

# MAKERS OF MODERN THOUGHT

by

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Interpreters of Man, etc.*



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## FOREWORD

THIS book has been written for lay readers who have a concern to extend their knowledge of the general trends of modern thought, particularly with reference to humanism and religion. and in this respect it is a companion volume to the studies published under the title *Interpreters of Man* (1943). If it appears that in some chapters too much space has been devoted to purely biographical narrative, the excuse must be that the writer has proved the value of the biographical method for students who, as far as the periods under review are concerned, have only a very limited knowledge of the historical background. Emphatically, no attempt has been made to provide a comprehensive summary or critical analysis of the various systems of thought associated with the thinkers here indicated.

G. O. G.



# 1

## THE MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND

### 1

UP to modern times, and ever since the Christian Faith conquered the culture of the West, the interpretation of Nature and of Man was governed by certain cardinal pre-suppositions. God was the Creator, Governor and Redeemer of the world; man was His offspring, made in His image, subject to His law, object of His grace, and heir to immortality: the moral law was universal, and the whole universe was providentially administered by Divine love, wisdom, and justice. Such conceptions as these underlay the entire structure of medieval culture, and no theory of Nature or of life which was incompatible with them was regarded as admissible. This attitude was of course "intolerant", and behind this intolerance was the temporal power of the Church. But not all intolerance is necessarily evil. How, for example, could the Churches of our own day be expected to be other than intolerant of those modern ideologies which have challenged not only the Christian tradition but almost all human values?

In so far as the Medieval Church was committed by her faith in the Christian revelation to certain beliefs about God, Man and the world, she was bound to do her thinking *a priori* from those premises and to reject such views as she held to be incompatible with them. For those principled beliefs which she had embraced were, for her, not only fundamental to the Church but fundamental also to Christian morality, to the culture which had flowered from the Faith and spread over the Western world, and to Christian civilization as a whole. To say this, of course, is not to say that the Church's method of enforcing her intolerance was right, nor that her judgment concerning what was compatible and what was incompatible with the Faith was sound. But

if we would understand something of this medieval background we must at least recognize the positive and uncompromising nature of the Christian tradition.

Medieval Christian thought, we say, was committed to the *a priori* method. It began with certain dogmas, certain fixed beliefs, certain general principles, and worked *downward* to particular facts. It did not begin with observed particular facts and work upward to general principles. And it was not only theologians who were expected to follow this "downward" *a priori* method, but men of science also. To us of the modern world, after three centuries of the inductive method which aims at fitting theory to facts, and not facts to theory—to us this medieval insistence upon interpreting Nature according to dogmatic preconceptions seems strange. But we must reflect that at least it was not a method invented by the Church to guard her monopoly; it was also the method of the great thinkers of the ancient pagan world.

Plato's thought worked downward from certain ideal conceptions, and we have another classic example in Aristotelian astronomy. Aristotle argues that the movement of the stars is *circular*, and he reasons on this wise. Every material thing is composed of *matter* and *form*; and of these *forms* there is an ascending gradation, with the stars at the top. Belonging to the highest order, the stars are perfect and eternal. Being perfect and eternal, they have perfect and eternal motion. The only perfect and eternal motion is circular. Therefore the stars move in circles. When therefore the medieval Christian thinkers began with certain dogmas about the nature of reality, about God and His relation to the world, and insisted that a true science must interpret all observable facts accordingly, they were taking a course in line with the high tradition of antiquity. And of course they believed they had a better foundation for their postulates than the pagan philosophers could claim for theirs.

We may turn, then, for another and different citation, to the good Canon who was born in 1473, who studied at Cracow, at Rome, at Padua, and at many other centres of learning, and who settled in the little Polish town of Frauenburg. One day a strange notion entered his head, and he wrote the notion in

a book; but he was frightened and kept the book shut away as a guilty secret for the best part of a lifetime. And the notion was this: that "the sun, the light of the world, is placed on a royal throne in the centre of the universe, where it guides the family of the stars, circling round it". When finally, an old man of seventy, he decided to release the book, he dedicated it to the Pope and wrote:

When I considered with myself what an absurd fairy-tale people brought up in the opinion, sanctioned by many ages, that the earth is motionless in the midst of the heaven, would think it if I were to assert on the contrary that the earth is moved, I hesitated long whether I would give to the light my commentaries composed in proof of this motion, or whether it would indeed be more satisfactory to follow the example of the Pythagoreans and various others who were wont to pass down the mysteries of philosophy, not by books but from hand to hand only, to their friends and relatives.<sup>1</sup>

The good Canon Kopernik, otherwise Copernicus, hesitated for so long for reasons that were obvious enough; but let us say that one of them was that he understood the power and importance of *imagination*. We all live, more perhaps than we think we do, in our imagination; and for long centuries the men of Copernicus's world had lived with the imaginative picture of the earth as the centre of the universe. They had been born into that conception, had done all their thinking and believing in it, had read their Bibles and made their creeds in it, and in it had done their buying and selling, their eating and drinking, their marrying and giving in marriage. And now the Copernican theory was to tear down that imaginative picture; it was to break up the old home and turn the heirloom furniture out of doors.

But an authoritarian Church saw these new ideas as threatening something more, and something worse, than a regrettable disturbance. The Church was committed, we say, to the *a priori* method. The doctors of the Faith felt no need of "the direct look at Nature", no need to build up their knowledge by a patient examination of observable facts, nor yet by philosophical speculation. They worked downward from first

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Stimson's tr. quoted in Kesten's *Copernicus and His World* (Secker and Warburg), 1946.

principles derived, as they believed, from Revelation. But now, if men, and even reverend canons, turned aside from Revelation and began constructing theories about the world and Nature after the conceits of their own minds, where would it all end? If, for example, they ceased to believe that the sun, moon and stars were set in their courses to serve man, how should they retain their belief that man had been set in this world to serve God? What, in short, could prevent the overthrow of ecclesiastical authority, the collapse of Christian standards, and the destruction of Christian civilization? This was the fear that drove the Church into opposition; and if the motives behind it were by no means unmixed, if the love of power and that jealous suspicion which the official mind entertains for innovation—if these were active, at least the fear was real. The age of Copernicus, of Luther, of Galileo, must have seemed like a second Flood, a second Confusion of Tongues. It was in fact the end of the world—the medieval world.

But long before Copernicus, as far back in fact as the thirteenth century, there was already, as we know, a widespread intellectual restiveness. There was, for one thing, the rise and influence of a great non-Christian civilization which challenged the Christian culture. There were Mohammedan mathematicians and men of science, philosophers and theologians, physicians and astronomers, chemists and alchemists: and this new learning seeped into the Western world. Besides this, and in consequence of the Crusades, there was the rediscovery of the ancient pagan classics; and the effect of this was revolutionary. For after Christianity had established itself and the Church had become all-powerful as teacher and educator, men had learned to think of the ancient world as a world of darkness and depravity; and now they began to read the works of the Greek philosophers and poets and to marvel at their enlightenment. What did it mean? In the days of Plato and Aristotle there was no Christian revelation, no Church, and yet there was wisdom, there was beauty, there was truth. Something was to be said, then, for the "natural man" as distinct from the Churchman, for human reason as distinct from revelation. Men of wealth

became patrons of the new learning and employed scribes to translate and copy the ancient books; student guilds were formed and group movements organized for the study of these works; and the universities of Christendom, including Paris and Oxford, were seething with this new and yeasty intellectual ferment.

Here, then, were the beginnings of that Renaissance or re-birth of culture whose influences were to multiply in succeeding centuries and are potent still. In the main its influence made for a new confidence in the powers of the human reason and the ability of Man to make his own way in the world. It was not anti-Christian. In Christendom the patrons and disciples of the new learning still heard Mass and professed the orthodox Faith; but they did so with mental reservations. It was as if within the household of faith a new circle was being formed, with family secrets of its own. The dogmatic authority of the Church as the inspirational centre of culture was tacitly challenged; not only among the laity but within the priesthood the new spirit was abroad; and it was all the more difficult to resist because it was a *spirit*, an atmosphere, rather than a body of definitive doctrine.

What followed was a remarkable counter-movement by the defenders of orthodoxy, foremost among its leaders being Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Instead of holding up hands of protest against this new enthusiasm for the pagan classics, these great doctors of the Church made themselves masters of the new learning, and, so to say, subpœnaed the ancient pagan writers as witnesses for the Faith. Particularly they made use of Aristotle, and proceeded to show that, so far from being contradictory of Christian dogma, the Aristotelian philosophy supported it. Their position was clearly defined.

There are, they argued, two great sources of knowledge, the one proceeding from Divine Revelation through the Scriptures and the Church, the other from human reason through the master intellects of the ages, of whom Aristotle was the great representative. Both these streams, the one flowing from God through Revelation, the other flowing from God through Reason, mingle in the one ocean of Truth: for, being the same



in their source, they are the same also in their consummation. The task, then, of Christian scholarship was to demonstrate this agreement, and this the new apologists, supremely Aquinas, set themselves to do. They erected a system of theology that rested upon both revelation and reason, upon the Scriptures and upon philosophy; and for this purpose Aristotle's logic and science were taken over and built into the massive edifice. The new apologists came to be known as Schoolmen and their movement Scholasticism.

One result of this new movement must be mentioned. The *a priori* method received new emphasis under Scholasticism. For the approach to Christian Dogma, like that to the formulations of human reason, had to be made through the discipline of logic and of rigorous proof. This syllogistic method of reasoning from given premises was adopted, then, by the Schoolmen as their *organum*, their "organ" or instrument of knowledge; it was Aristotelian, and it lay to their hand: and, within the iron limits of their system, they achieved almost everything that sheer intellectual discipline, logical accuracy, and immense learning could accomplish. And of course the syllogistic method was essentially the *a priori* method; it was deductive, not inductive; it worked from the general to the particular, not from the particular to the general.

But already in the thirteenth century, and within the Church, there was a movement toward a new *organum*. And if we need a figure to personify it we shall find it in an Englishman whom Hallam called "by far the truest philosopher of the Middle Ages", and whom an Elizabethan dramatist thus apostrophized:

Lordly thou look'st . . .  
Thy countenance as if Science held her seat  
Between the circled arches of thy brow

## 2

Roger Bacon, a Somerset man, was born about 1214. His was the age of Magna Carta and of the fourth Crusade; it was also the time of the new religious awakening under St. Francis of Assisi. In fact, Roger Bacon was still a boy when the

Franciscan friars landed in England, and years later he himself joined the Order. But first he took his Master's degree at Oxford and then set out for Paris, the great centre, in those days, of scholarly illumination. Here, at twenty-one, he found himself one of a great company of students gathered from all parts of Europe, and with them he attended lectures on theology and the sciences. He seems to have remained in Paris until he was nearly forty, and by that time he himself was lecturing and building up a European reputation. Then his health broke down and he retired from academic work; by this time, also, he had joined the Franciscans.

St. Francis, as we know, had no use for book-learning. "There are so many in our days", he is said to have declared, "who want to seek wisdom and learning, that happy is he who, out of love for the Lord, makes himself ignorant and unlearned"; and the story goes that, finding one of the Little Brothers reading a breviary, he reached down into the hearth where a wood-fire was burning and vigorously anointed the studious head with the hot ashes. "When once you have got a Psalter", exclaimed the Saint, "you want a Breviary, and when you have got a Breviary you will want to sit in the high seat like a great prelate". In short, Francis no more desired that his Little Brothers should acquire curious knowledge than that they should acquire wealth. But the Saint was dead, the zest for learning had spread like a fever, and a Franciscan habit afforded no immunity. Roger Bacon certainly was stricken early and incurably. Greek, Hebrew, mathematics, astrology, alchemy, botany, optics, meteorology—he had room in his head for everything, and his learned treatises multiplied. Moreover he was intractable, and got into trouble with his superiors. Perhaps it was for this cause, and not for overt heresy, that his writings—they contained rude personal gibes at his adversaries—were placed under an interdict and he himself spent much of the time remaining to him in prison. Yet in 1266 we find a friendly Pope, Clement IV, requiring of Roger a copy of his major works.

But the important consideration here is that Roger Bacon was a pioneer in the advocacy and use of what we now know as the scientific method. For while the learned men of his day

were primarily concerned with what they believed to be the *meaning* and *purpose* of the processes of Nature, this Franciscan friar was concerned to understand the actual processes themselves, and this by direct observation and experiment. There are, he argues, four great stumbling-blocks in the way of knowledge: first *Authority*, second *Habit*, third *Appearance*, and fourth *The concealment of ignorance behind a show of learning*—an enumeration that consorts, as we shall see later, with the “four idols” of his namesake Francis Bacon. In his own major work—*Opus Majus*—submitted to the friendly Pope, Roger Bacon enlarges upon this general theme, affirming the rights of human reason and indicating the scope of what we ourselves might call a Christian rationalism. Religion and Science, he argues (and it was substantially the Scholastic thesis), are properly parts of one whole. The true faith of a Christian and the sound learning of a man of science ought not to be incompatible, neither should authority be at odds with reason. But (he continues) perfection is rare, error is common, and even the Fathers of the Church were men. Antiquity is no infallible sign of truth, neither is common acceptance a sure certificate of it; and how much less the judgments of ignorance and prejudice?

There are, in fact, he asserts, two methods of attesting truth, the one by *argument* and the other by *experiment*. Argument may be dialectically conclusive, but it cannot provide that assurance which comes of experiment and experience. And he proceeds, after extolling Mathematics as a study fundamental to all the sciences, to propose subjects for reasonable inquiry. What is the form of the earth? What is the cause of heat? Are there one sun and moon, or many? Why does distance make square towers appear round? Why does distance make objects appear smaller? Why, on the other hand, does the sun, when it is near the horizon, seem to grow bigger? Moreover, putting into practice the methods that he advocates, he makes chemical and other experiments—experiments which presently put him under suspicion of black magic. Thus he finds, for example, that, by mixing sulphur and charcoal and saltpetre, he can obtain a tolerable imitation of thunder and lightning; and he even toys with the notion of flying machines.

It is easy to imagine the troubled and rebuking spirit of St.

Francis standing in the shadows of this wayward Roger's study; and if the Saint had been present in the flesh, no doubt the friar's learned head would have been in danger of an anointing with hot wood-ash. But we have learned little if we are moved only to amused reflection. We can see to-day that the new method and the new knowledge, advocated by this strange Franciscan, were to lead directly enough to the machine age—were to lead in due time to the “V2” and the atomic bomb. Perhaps, indeed, we shall catch ourselves wondering whether, if the friar himself could have foreseen the full result, he would still have followed his curious experiments with the same confident and combative enthusiasm.

In any case had not the insight of the Saint penetrated farther into the truth of things? Was it not the business of his friars to proclaim the faith that worketh by love, rather than the knowledge that leadeth to power? Was it not Man's urgent need that he should first establish his own allegiance to the kingdom of justice and mercy and love before he pushed his empery farther into the kingdom of Nature? What should it profit mankind that, understanding all mysteries and all knowledge, they should presently take to themselves the wings of the morning, carry their kingdom to the uttermost parts of the sea, and, “by wondrous art pontifical”, span the very heavens and bind the sweet influences of Pleiades and Orion—what should it profit them if at last, and through the abuse of their own powers, they should make their bed in hell?

And yet we shall probably feel that Roger Bacon stood in the tradition of a true Christian humanism when he contended that reason has its own sphere and its own just prerogatives, and that authority must not attempt to depose it in the name of faith. When authority actually made the attempt, and sought to coerce reason through the proscriptions of orthodoxy and the penalties of the temporal power, then it was faith itself that was defamed. This indeed was the tragic error. The intellectual virtues of honesty, candour and courage cannot be cowed into conformity by any ecclesiastical dragonade, and it is never faith, but fear, that inspires the attempt. In short, it may seem that there was no real reason why Christianity and humanism should have been forced into opposite camps. The

true claim of faith is mainly, as Professor Maritain contends, that humanism should recognize *two* dimensions—the vertical as well as the horizontal, the Godward as well as the manward relationship. And this claim should be regarded, not as a basis for a forced diplomatic compromise, a reluctant concordat between incompatible rival powers, but as something dictated by the nature of reality.

On the other hand, the tragic error of modern humanism has been that it has thought it could dispense with any doctrine of God by “speaking of man in a high voice”. Admittedly it was not an error that announced itself at once and dramatically, taking the stage in full character from the beginning of our modern time. On the contrary, a beginning was made, by Francis Bacon and Descartes, with some show of that “diplomatic concordat” of which we have spoken. God was allowed to be God and man to be man, and their respective kingdoms were recognized; but even though suzerain powers were conceded to the Divine realm, it was the kingdom of man, romantic and full of promise, that held the imagination. Thus with every fresh triumph of the inductive method, every new victory of the new knowledge, man’s rational self-sufficiency was confirmed; and not this only, but his moral self-sufficiency also. Already in Spinoza we shall see man the Thinker rising to the height of his own apocalyptic powers and assuming both his independence of Revelation and the adequacy of his own moral and spiritual resources as part of the Divine Whole. And even the thought of Kant, far enough removed from Spinoza’s pantheism, vibrates to that twofold iron chord.

In this general direction, with many variations, the *motif* runs and Revelation and Grace pass into *diminuendo* before the *crescendo* of Reason and Moral Ability. In this way, and more and more as our modern age develops, man becomes the centre of interest to himself, and this psychological anthropocentrism gradually works itself out. Developing into that “horizontal”, one-dimensional humanism which Maritain describes and deplores, it passes into that *anti-humanism* which Berdyaëv sees as the last strange bitter fruit of Renaissance naturalism.

As, therefore, in these short studies we trace something of the course of humanistic thought, we shall see how modern

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man has come to suffer from what may be called an *in-growing* faculty of worship. It has turned inward for lack of a God-ward outlet, and, so doing, has cut into the quick of man's self-consciousness and inflamed it. Of the resulting Man-worship we have the philosophical elaboration in Comtism as we have its poetical celebration in (for example) Swinburne's *Hertha*; its later manifestations, materialistic, anti-personal, anti-rational, or anti-human, we shall note in later chapters.

## 2

### FRANCIS BACON

#### 1

**B**Y the time of Francis Bacon much water had flowed between the banks of the Thames since his namesake Roger had busied himself with his curious researches and experiments. The England of Francis Bacon was a different England and his world a different world from the England and the world of Bacon the Franciscan. Pre-eminently it was an age of exploration. Navigators, with the aid of the mariner's compass, were exploring the uncharted seas; astronomers with their new instrument, the telescope, were exploring the heavens; scholars, helped by the new invention of printing, were exploring all the known continents of learning; and while Columbus had discovered the new world beyond the Atlantic, and the Renaissance had rediscovered the lost Atlantis of classical culture, the Protestant Reformation claimed to have brought to light the almost forgotten world of Evangelical Christianity and to have unearthed its Gospel treasures.

Froude, in his study of Henry VIII, celebrates all this in a quotable passage. A change, he says, was coming over the world, a change whose meaning and direction he could then, in the nineteenth century, describe as still hidden from us.

The paths trodden by the footsteps of ages were broken up; old things were passing away, and the faith and the life of ten centuries were dissolving like a dream. Chivalry was dying; the abbey and the castle were seen together to crumble into ruins; and all the forms, desires, beliefs of the old world were passing away, never to return. A new continent had risen up beyond the western sea. The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space . . . in the fabric of habit which they had so laboriously built for themselves, mankind were to remain no longer

The gulf that separates us from that pre-Elizabethan world is now, he says, impassable. Perhaps (he thinks) the sound of church bells, "that peculiar creation of the medieval age", may waft us faint echoes of that unvisited world; or an hour spent in some old cathedral, in its chapels and crypts, among those silent recumbent figures of the past—perhaps in such an hour some faint mirage may float before us, some dream-picture of the England, the world, that are no more; but the unbridged sundering gulf remains. And if that is true, we may add to Froude's reflection the thought that we cannot now return to that other, new, enchanted world of the Elizabethan time. In Froude's own time it was still, perhaps, visitable land; for the nineteenth century had not lost contact with the *romance* of science and of human progress; but we cannot to-day recover that blithe sense of conquest and confidence, of high adventure and illimitable glorious possibility, which once thrilled the minds of men. The faery trumpets sound no more—those horns of elfland that blew for Bacon and his contemporaries and invited them to enchanted fields.

Into such an age, then, and in the year 1561, Francis Bacon was born, and of his life Dean Church, in the opening chapter of his biography, could write:

It is the life of a man endowed with as rare a combination of noble gifts as ever was bestowed on a human intellect; the life of one with whom the whole purpose of living and of every day's work was to do great things to enlighten and elevate his race, to enrich it with new powers, to lay up in store for all ages to come a source of blessings which would never fail or dry up. . . . All his life long his first and never-sleeping passion was the romantic and splendid ambition after knowledge, for the conquest of nature and for the service of man

Of a life that could sustain such a description it is strange to read Church's confession that it was one which it was a pain to write or to read; or it would be strange if the unhappy story of it had not long since passed into history and become more or less familiar to us all. Certainly Bacon played many parts, all of them memorable and many of them lamentable. We think of him as scholar, as man of letters; we think of him as a Parlia-



mentarian who sat in all the nine parliaments of his time; we think of him as a great jurist, Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Privy Councillor, Keeper of the King's Seal, Lord Chancellor, Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Albans: and if, as seems likely, the true Francis Bacon is not to be recognized in any of these *personæ*, the vexed problem of interpretation, moral and psychological, is not ours to solve. On the other hand we cannot be completely indifferent to the human story, for our method in these studies is to be more or less biographical.

Here, then, was a man born in the most captivating era in English history, and born within the privileged circle of the ruling families, his father the Keeper of the Great Seal during twenty years of Elizabeth's reign. As a mere child, and by his gravity and precocity, this young Francis won the favour of the Queen, and at thirteen he was a student at Cambridge. At sixteen, and under the care of the Queen's minister at the French court, he took up residence in Paris in order to study foreign affairs; at nineteen he was recalled to England on the death of his father. At twenty-nine he became Queen's Counsel, and three years later took his seat in Parliament as member for Middlesex. He early impressed the House, and his gifts of speech must have been notable. Ben Jonson, who heard him plead as an advocate, wrote of him: "No man ever spoke more neatly, more precisely, more weightily, nor suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered. . . . His hearers could not cough or look aside from him without loss. . . . The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end".

A man of such parts might have stood, as we say, on his own feet and cultivated a manly independence. Not so Bacon. There were in him incongruous weaknesses—a soft sensuousness and almost feminine vanity and love of display, greed of money and wanton carelessness in the management of it, a lust for worldly honours and a love of intrigue. From the first he was a time-server and place-hunter, writing servile letters to his powerful friends (he had the Cecils for kinsfolk), and scheming for preferment. The Earl of Essex befriended him. No doubt Essex owed something, perhaps very much, to the Bacons—to Francis and to his scheming brother, Anthony: but the Earl's kindness was without calculation. He may have been head-

strong, vain, ambitious, but his generosity was no more to be doubted than his courage, and upon Francis he lavished lordly gifts and benefactions. Yet when Essex fell under his sovereign's disfavour and committed his final and fatal folly, it was Bacon who took up the prosecution for treason, secured his patron's conviction, and, after the executioner had done his work, stooped to blacken Essex's memory with a state-paper full of vilification.

He received his reward. At the age of forty-six (he was already knighted) he became Solicitor-General, and five years later Attorney-General. Needing a new friend at court, he attached himself to Buckingham, fawning upon that young bully and meekly accepting insolence and insult in return. And servility paid as rich a dividend as ingratitude. Thanks to Buckingham, he became Keeper of the Great Seal, and on the first day of term we behold him as principal in such a spectacle as he loved—riding in state to Westminster Hall “with the Lord Treasurer on his right hand, the Lord Privy Seal on his left, a long procession of students and ushers before him, and a crowd of peers, privy councillors and judges following in his train”. He spent £700 on this single day of pomp and pageantry, £2,000 on a masque in honour of Somerset's marriage; and while he was squandering money with both hands on princely displays he was paying interest to esurient creditors. That was the Baconian psychopathy; fine clothes, fine houses, fine company—he loved it all. He lived in style at York House, and kept a country estate at Gorhambury, with a garden laid out at the cost of ten thousand pounds. King James observed that Bacon's liveried servants were “beseamed and behung with gold buttons”, and were “costlier” than his own; and when he drove out it was the same: Bacon's retinue vied with that of royalty. And if his debts increased his honours multiplied. He became Lord Chancellor—Baron Verulam—Viscount St. Albans. At sixty the publication of his *Novum Organum* won him a European reputation.

And then, suddenly, the blow fell. An angry Parliament, aroused by rumours of widespread corruption in high places, appointed a committee of inquiry, naming particularly certain allegations against the Lord Chancellor. Bacon offered no

defence; instead he took to his bed, pleaded guilty, and cast himself upon the mercy of his judges. Perhaps he was urged to do so by the King; perhaps also his indictment was a political move, with Bacon selected, as foredoomed scapegoat, to carry into the wilderness the sins of the camp; but his confession was explicit: "Upon advised consideration of the charges, descending into my own conscience, and calling my memory to account so far as I am able, I do plainly and ingenuously confess that I am guilty of corruption, and do renounce all defence". He was deprived of office, heavily fined, and sentenced to imprisonment in the Tower. Even so, this extraordinary being refused, as he put it, to be plucked of his feathers. His Tower imprisonment was only nominal; he sold York House to pay the fine, but continued to live in princely style at Gorhambury and take the road with his usual glittering retinue; and for the rest, he plunged more deeply into his philosophic studies, wrote incessantly, and made scientific experiments. He was now sixty-five, and the end was near. One day (it was in early spring, and there had been a fall of snow) he stopped his coach near Highgate, bought a fowl from a cottager, stuffed the carcass with snow for experimental purposes, and was stricken with a chill. He was carried to the nearby house of the Earl of Arundel, where he died a week later, cheered at the last to hear that the stuffed chicken was doing "excellently well".

Such is the story of Bacon's external life; and it may be strange to reflect that the one who lived it was the man from whom the modern age received its great intellectual and scientific impulse; almost one might say its *spiritual* impulse: for it was not Bacon's specific scientific discoveries or elaborations, but his method and spirit, which were to influence succeeding generations. And here in fact the enigma and paradox of his life are significant for our general theme. For Bacon embodies in himself, and illustrates in his life, something of that human problem which humanism has always been unable to solve. Moreover, like so much of modern humanism itself, he never seems to have recognized the gravity of that problem, either for himself or for the world. Perhaps he never fully recognized even the inward schism which disabled him, himself, and which, in varying degrees, afflicts us all. Those, says Macaulay, who

survey only one half of his character may speak of him with either unmixed admiration or unmixed contempt, according to which half is surveyed. Bacon the seeker after preferment was one man, Bacon the seeker after knowledge another. His was a nature singularly free from the heats of normal passion, but the temperature of his cupidity was always sufficient to incubate intrigues more shameful than any mere passionate folly. On the other side we have his constancy in all the intellectual virtues, his disinterested zeal for the advancement of science, and, through science, of mankind.

Most commentators dwell upon this contrast; what has not been noted, or sufficiently noted, is the fact that one motive was operative in both of these disparate sides of his character—the quest of power, *and with it the persuasion that this power must be good.* For Bacon sought power for mankind no less seriously than he sought it for himself. In his own case he sought it through office, never doubting his own moral ability to turn every coveted preferment to good account for the nation and realm. Similarly for mankind he sought power through knowledge and the control of the secrets of Nature, never doubting the moral ability of Man to employ it for the good of the world. He no more questioned Man's fitness for the chancellorship of the forces of Nature than his own fitness for the Chancellorship of England. In both cases, perhaps, he was mistaken, but such, nevertheless, was the persuasion that inspired his life—one might say his two lives.

And so we turn to his other life, the life of philosophy.

## 2

When he was a young man of twenty-five Bacon sketched out an enterprise which he entitled "The Greatest Birth of Time". Of the purpose that then animated him he declared, forty years later, that in all that interval it had not waxed old nor had his mind once cooled toward it. And what was this purpose, this project? It was his conviction, he tells us, that the knowledge of Nature was within the capacity of man; that for the building up of that knowledge entirely new foundations were necessary; and that, for these to be well and truly laid, the existing founda-

tions of the older philosophies must first be cleared away. And the new foundations—what were they? Bacon had a simple answer. They were to be “new and natural methods of investigation and construction”. But, indeed, the figure itself, which is not Bacon’s, does not fully suggest the enterprise. For these “new and natural methods” were to be something more than a foundation; they were to be the instrument, the *organum*, the master-key which should unlock the secrets of Nature and open to mankind the doors of undreamed-of power and happiness.

Let another instance be cited, also dating from his early manhood. He composed an essay in praise of knowledge. In it he names certain hindrances to what he calls the “happy match between the mind of man and the nature of things”, and he goes on: “No doubt the sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge, wherein many things are reserved which kings with their treasures cannot buy nor with their force command”: for “now we govern Nature in opinions, but we are thrall unto her necessity: but if we could be led by her in invention, we should command her in action”. However lordly we may be in our attitude to Nature, and in fastening our notions upon her, it is she who governs us in actual fact; whereas if we went to her not as lords but as learners, and heeded what she has to teach, then we should soon possess such knowledge as would put her in thrall to us as bondsman to our action and purpose.

This, then, was the Baconian doctrine; this was to be the enterprise which should prove “the greatest birth of time”. And it was an enterprise for whose direction he regarded himself as specially equipped.

For myself, I found that I was fitted for nothing so well as for the study of Truth . . . as being gifted by nature with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to reconsider, carefulness to dispose and set in order; and as being a man that neither affects what is new nor admires what is old, and that hates every kind of imposture.

Memorable words! For whatever we may think of the self-portraiture, we are given a perfect expression of the scientific virtues, as we understand them to-day. The very enumerating of them was a sign that the new age had dawned: for no

medieval schoolman would ever have compiled such a list, or sat for such a portrait. And as for the portrait itself, have we not here the real Francis Bacon, or at least that which he really desired to be? The real Bacon, we may believe, was the man who dreamed this dream of "the greatest birth of time"; who, in his early manhood held it as the mistress of his mind, the lode-star of his ambition; and who, in his old age, fallen, impoverished, disgraced, still cherished it with the ardour of youth, the constancy of experience, and died in its thrall and service. The real Bacon was the Bacon of the *Great Instauration*, the *Advancement of Learning*, the *New Atlantis*, the *Novum Organum*, for these were the works in which he served his dream.

And we must be fair to the dreamer. It was of the *regnum hominis*, the Kingdom of Man, that he dreamed. And it is true that it was as a purely secular enterprise, however splendid and romantic, that it captivated the minds of future generations. It was the dream of human power and glory, the exaltation of the natural man, the pride and splendour of his ever-widening empire. But when we read the writings of Bacon himself we see that again and again, deliberately and explicitly, he subordinated it to a professed religious faith and held it within the frame of a religious conception. We may, of course, doubt the sincerity of these avowals. The effusive homage to earthly princes which marks the literary style of the Elizabethans may have influenced the Baconian references to the Deity also; and we may think it vain to look for religious sincerity in a soul so cankered as Bacon's with ambition and intrigue; so that if he dressed his advocacy of science in the language of piety it may have been from no higher motive than that of saving his project from the excitable prejudices of the faithful. But the fact remains that he presented his case in the language of faith.

Some are weakly afraid lest a deeper search into Nature should transgress the permitted limits of sobermindedness; wrongfully wresting and transferring what is said in Holy Writ against those who pry into sacred mysteries, to the hidden things of Nature, which are barred by no prohibition. Others with more subtlety surmise and reflect that if second causes are unknown everything can the more readily be referred to the Divine hand . . . which is in fact but to seek to gratify God with a lie. And others again

appear apprehensive that in the investigation of Nature something may be found to subvert or at least shake the authority of religion, especially with the unlearned. But these two last fears seem to me to savour utterly of carnal wisdom; as if men in the recesses and secret thoughts of their hearts doubted and distrusted the strength of religion and the empire of faith over sense, and therefore feared that the investigation of truth in Nature might be dangerous to them. But if the matter be truly considered, Natural Philosophy is, after the Word of God, at once the surest medicine against superstition and the most approved nourishment for faith, and therefore she is rightly given to religion as her most faithful handmaid, since the one displays the will of God, the other His power <sup>1</sup>

And again:

If the debasement of arts and sciences to purposes of wickedness, luxury, and the like, be made a ground of objection, let no one be moved thereby. For the same may be said of all earthly goods.

. . . Only let the human race recover that right over Nature which belongs to it by divine bequest, and let power be given it: the exercise thereof will be governed by sound reason and true religion <sup>2</sup>

Sound reason and true religion; nothing could be more sure than that Man's restored rights over Nature, and his consequent enlargement of power, would be governed by these; and this, as Bacon proceeds to argue, notwithstanding the Fall. For admittedly the Fall lost Man both his innocency and his dominion over creation, but as the loss of innocency may in part be repaired by religion and faith, so the lost dominion may in some measure be restored through the arts and sciences. "For the creation was not by the curse made altogether and for ever a rebel, but in virtue of that charter, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread', it is now by various labours (not certainly by disputations or idle magical ceremonies, but by various labours) at length and in some measure subdued to . . . the uses of human life".

And finally and explicitly this:

For myself, I am not raising a capitol or pyramid to the pride of man, but laying a foundation in the human understanding for a holy temple after the model of the world.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Novum Organum*, xxxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, cxx.

And in all this Bacon was in accord with the sober mood and counsel of his time. For the Elizabethans, though the faery trumpetry was in their ears, were not mad nor were their wits so charmed by high adventure that they lost their native sobriety. And what steadied them was their belief that, after all, the brave new world in which they found themselves was God's world and under His law. Indeed, this sense of Law was very strong. Her abode, declared Hooker, is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world: "All things in heaven and earth do her homage—the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power: both angels and men and creatures of what condition soever—though each in different sort and manner, yet all with universal consent—admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy". And, as Gardiner remarks, this same note, which we might expect of a divine like Hooker, we find also in Spenser and Shakespeare. In the *Faerie Queene* the true wisdom of man is shown to be rooted in reverence for that Law which proceeds from the Divine Love and Wisdom; and Shakespeare in numberless passages celebrates the same theme. And so Bacon himself:

When men are puffed up with arts and knowledge, they often try to subdue even the Divine Wisdom and bring it under the dominion of sense and reason, whence inevitably follows a perpetual and restless rending and tearing of the mind.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever, then, we make of these professions, we must recognize that we cannot look to Bacon for a purely naturalistic humanism.

## 3

It remains true that with Bacon, as with his intellectual successors, the master-interest is Man and his kingdom. "I must request men not to suppose", he declares, "that after the fashion of ancient Greeks, and of certain moderns . . . I wish to found a new sect in philosophy. For this is not what I am about. . . . My purpose, on the contrary, is to try whether I cannot in very fact lay more firmly the foundations, and extend more widely the limits, of the power and greatness of man".

<sup>1</sup> Prometheus, *Wisdom of the Ancients*.



We have seen how this was to be done. Mankind were to be put into a new and truer knowledge of the physical world, and with that knowledge they were to exploit the resources of Nature in the interests of human progress and happiness. And the method was precise. First and negatively, the old traditional systems of knowledge were to be discarded, and with them all "doting fondness" for "scraps of Grecian knowledge" and the "frivolous disputations" which went with it; or more comprehensively, all the varied idols of fallacy and injustice that deceive the mind must be abjured. So we have the celebrated enumeration of the Four Idols: first, those false opinions and fancies (such as the notion "that Nature acts as man does") which easily beset the minds of men in general—the idols of the *tribe*; second, those errors which attach themselves to individual minds through faulty education and custom—the idols of the *cave*; third, those errors of vulgar sort which seduce the understanding of the people through "the juggleries and charms of words"—as we might say, through catch-phrases and the arts of the demagogue; which errors are the idols of the *market-place*; and for the fourth, which are the idols of the *theatre*, he names "corrupt theories or systems of philosophy", or false ideologies. But on the positive side the end was to be achieved through a revolution in the *method* of knowledge, namely, by turning from the *a priori*, syllogistic, deductive method of the schools to that of direct observation, experiment, and induction.

Human knowledge, he complained, was become a mere medley, a mass of accidental particulars and childish notions, mixed with much credulity. There was as yet no true natural philosophy—none that was not tainted and corrupted either by Aristotelian logic or by Platonic natural theology. The phrasing here is careful and perhaps diplomatic, as if the original error lay with the ancient pagans and not with the Fathers of the Church. In any case, the only hope was in a new birth of science, "that is, in raising it regularly up from experience". "To experience we must come", but no adequate effort had yet been made to "collect a store of observations sufficient either in number, or in kind, or in certainty, to inform the understanding". And this was not all. Not only must a vastly greater number of experiments be procured, but an entirely

different method and order for conducting, classifying, and tabulating them must be introduced. And he proceeded to sketch out a prodigious, and no doubt unworkable, scheme of "Tables of Discovery, apt, well arranged, drawn up and marshalled", for the co-ordinating of all departments of research. A heavy imposition, he recognizes, but urges that for this enterprise of the new science "the understanding must not be supplied with wings, but rather hung with weights, to keep it from leaping and flying".

And here it is inevitable that we should note the connection between this new scientific movement of which Bacon was the evangelist and the Protestant movement under Luther. Just as Bacon appealed direct to Nature, so Luther had appealed direct to the Scriptures. Just as Bacon protested against the interposition between man and Nature of the authoritarian dogmatism of the Old Philosophy, so Luther had protested against the interposition between man and the Scriptures (and still more, between man and God) of the priestly authority of the medieval Church. Moreover both Luther and Bacon, in demanding this direct contact between subject and object, and in recognizing the necessity for a real change of mind (repentance) on the part of the seeker after truth, recognized also that the work, as Edward Caird puts it, must be "carried on from beginning to end in and through the consciousness of the individual himself". Thus far, at all events, the New Science marched with the Reformation. It took over and applied to the study of Nature precisely those principles which Protestantism applied to the study of Holy Scripture. Presently the order was to be reversed. The methods and results of scientific criticism and research, developed in the secular schools, were to be taken over and applied to the study of the sacred books.

And so the great project was launched, and of its future success, and his own undying fame as its initiator, Bacon had no manner of doubt. "I promise to myself", he confesses, "like fortune to Alexander the Great, and let no man tax me with vanity till he have heard me out". For, regarding Alexander's miracles of conquest, he remembers that Livy contends that they were due to nothing more wonderful than the conqueror's courage to despise vain apprehensions—to dare, and dare

*intelligently*, where others had shrunk back; "and a like judgment I suppose may be passed on myself in future ages". Moreover he thinks that men may take some hope from his own example: that being of all men of his time the most busied in affairs of state, and a man of health not very strong, and, furthermore, altogether a pioneer in this new course, following in no man's footprints and taking counsel of none, he nevertheless, by "submitting his mind to Things" and resolutely pursuing the true road, had already advanced these matters some little way.

It is, then, a matter of some significance that it was such a man as Bacon who opened for us our new era of scientific humanism, and who illustrated in his own life the moral limitations of its powers of achievement. It cannot be claimed for him that he was the first to practise the scientific method, nor that the grandiose scheme of scientific enterprise which he elaborated has itself been of practical service. A civilization of archangels could hardly have sufficed to carry to its consummation a design so prodigious—a design which had for its modest beginnings a sort of stock-taking or inventory of the natural world with an encyclopædic, analytical tabulation of the same and the co-ordination of all inductive conclusions, and which aimed finally at something like an organized scientific omniscience and omnicompetence. But it can be claimed for him that, above all men of his time, he projected a reformation in human knowledge, summoning men's minds from vague theorizings and academic preconceptions to a patient and humble and experimental investigation of facts; and that, so doing, he became the pioneer of scientific progress. That this progress must mean human progress as such and the advancement of human happiness—this was his illusion and the illusion of his age.

And so we end with a parable. Francis Bacon had one severe and sharp-eyed critic in his own household—his mother. She may have been all that it pleased Mr. Lytton Strachey to make her out to have been—a "terrific dowager", "crumpled and puritanical", who flavoured her evangelicalism with a slight tincture of sadism. But she had had great hopes of her youngest son, Francis. He was, in his youth, as she said, a towardly young gentleman, and a son of much good hope in godliness.

She had, however, lived to see what she described as "cormorant seducers and instruments of Satan" pervert him "to the displeasing of God". Of Francis's filial letters she complains to Anthony, "I do not understand his enigmatical folded writing", though he has "good gifts of natural wit and understanding"; what was wanting was that "the same God that hath given them to him" should "sanctify his heart by the right use of them to glorify the Giver of them, to his own inward comfort". Instead she observes his love of outward show, his spendthrift ways, his debts, and his countenancing of what she names as "foul sin". "Surely" (she writes to Anthony)—

I pity your brother, yet so long as he pitieth not himself but keepeth that bloody Percy, as I told him then, yea, as a coach companion and bed companion—a proud, profane, costly fellow, whose being about him I verily fear the Lord doth mislike and doth less bless your brother in credit and otherwise in his health—surely I am utterly discouraged . . .<sup>1</sup>

and so on at great length and a trifle incoherently. Perhaps she was bigoted and prejudiced, but she was not blind. She had seen in her son the black spot which was to grow and spread, and which not all his "natural wit and good understanding" could remedy, nor his Chancellor's robes conceal. It was Bacon's own illusion, not indeed that the black spot in man could be remedied by science and the advancement of learning, but that its malignancy was so limited that natural reason and the normal checks of religion could be relied upon to render it negligible.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Strachey, *Elizabeth and Essex*.

### 3

#### DESCARTES

##### 1

ACCORDING to Professor Maritain, what we have in Descartes is not Humanism but Angelism; but of this more in due time. Our concern is first with the outward facts of his life. René Descartes was the son of a provincial councillor of Touraine, and Francis Bacon was already a man of thirty when—in 1596—René first saw the light of day. His mother died while he was still a baby, and he himself was a sickly child. At the age of eight he entered the famous Jesuit school at La Flèche and remained there until he was sixteen, by which time he had absorbed all the book-learning the school had to impart. The Jesuit fathers recognized his superior abilities and allowed him, after a while, to conduct his studies in his own way—to make his own time-table, rise as late as he pleased, and to have the run of the college library. In his *Discourse on Method*, which contains his own intellectual biography, he tells us what followed. When, at the age of sixteen, he had completed his course, he was embarrassed to discover that instead of knowing everything he knew nothing—a confession which drew from T. H. Huxley the comment that this showed that Descartes's teachers must have done their work well. The fact was, of course, that already in his own mind Descartes was equating "knowledge" with the sure apprehension of reality.

To quote from the *Discourse*:<sup>1</sup>

I found myself embarrassed with so many doubts and errors that it seemed to me that the effort to instruct myself had no effect other than the increasing discovery of my own ignorance. And yet I was studying at one of the most celebrated Schools in Europe, where I thought there must be men of learning, if they were to be found anywhere in the world. I learned there all that others learned; and not being satisfied with the sciences that we were taught, I even read through all the books that came into

<sup>1</sup>The quotations are taken from Dent's Everyman's Library edition.

my hands, treating of what is considered most curious and rare. Along with this I knew the judgments that others had formed of me, and I did not feel that I was esteemed inferior. . . .

And yet, as it seemed, all this accumulated knowledge was no more than copious ignorance. At the same age of sixteen Francis Bacon had left Cambridge with much the same feeling. We may as well continue the quotation and note his slightly malicious reference to philosophy, theology and the learned professions.

I did not omit, however, always to hold in esteem those exercises which are the occupation of the Schools. I knew that the Languages which one learns there are essential for the understanding of all ancient literature. . . . I was aware that the reading of all good books is indeed like a conversation with the noblest men of past centuries . . . nay, a carefully studied conversation, in which they reveal to us none but the best of their thoughts. I deemed Eloquence to have a power and beauty beyond compare; that Poesy has most ravishing delicacy and sweetness; that in Mathematics there are the subtlest discoveries and inventions which may accomplish much . . . that those writings that deal with Morals contain much that is instructive and many exhortations to virtue which are most useful; that Theology points out the way to Heaven; that Philosophy teaches us to speak with an appearance of truth on all things, and causes us to be admired by the less learned; that Jurisprudence and Medicine and all other sciences bring honour and riches to those who cultivate them; and finally that it is good to have examined all things, even those most full of superstition and falsehood, in order that we may know their just value and avoid being deceived by them.

Theology pointed the way to Heaven, and Philosophy enabled one to discourse upon everything with an admirable impressiveness and appearance of truth; but what did it all amount to? On the whole, and apart from such-like quips, he was guarded enough in any reference that concerned the interests of the Church. Nor was there, in the Europe of his day, and for a mind schooled, as his had been, in the Roman orthodoxy, any incentive to exchange the Catholic tradition for the supposedly freer traditions of Protestantism. Religious intolerance everywhere ran high, and the Union of Protestant princes

under Frederic IV of the Palatinate was countered by the League of Catholic princes under Maximilian. Henry IV of France had, it is true, meditated a Concert of Europe, allowing free trade and navigation between the Powers, and providing for the resistance of any aggressor nation by the combined action of the Concert; but, with Henry's assassination in 1610 (when Descartes was fourteen), the Continent crashed inevitably into the Thirty Years War.

And certainly the Protestantism of Descartes's time offered few attractions to the inquiring mind. The Lutherans, in spite of the Union, were intolerant of the Calvinists, the Calvinists of the Lutherans, and the strict Lutherans of the Melancthonites. Hohenegg, Lutheran theologian to the Saxon court, saw it to be "plain as the noon-day sun" that Calvinism reeked of blasphemy, and that to take up arms for its upholders was "nothing else than to serve under the originator of Calvinism, the Devil". "We ought", he admitted, "to give our lives for the brethren, but the Calvinists are not our brethren. We ought to love our enemies: the Calvinists are not *our* enemies but God's".<sup>1</sup> It was not an edifying spectacle. Moreover, in Catholic eyes, that authority in matters of faith which Protestantism denied to the Pope, the Protestants themselves had yielded to secular and often godless princes, thus dividing the Church and giving it, for one spiritual head, a hundred graceless ones.

All this, then, may explain a certain irony and cynicism in Descartes, and his early determination not to excite his own Church's flair for heresy. "I honoured our Theology", he is at pains to confess, "and aspired as much as anyone to reach Heaven"; but he was constrained to admit that the revealed truths which lead thither were quite above human intelligence, and therefore he could not dare (he avows) submit them to the feebleness of his own reasonings. In the next century, Hume, with more open irony, allowed that nothing argued the truth of revelation more convincingly than the fact that its doctrines could never be suspected of proceeding from human reason: but the undertone of both *dicta* is the same.

<sup>1</sup> Hausser, *Period of the Reformation* (quoted by Andrews, *Institutes of General History*, 7th edn., p. 310).

As for the lamentable disunity of Christendom, Bacon, writing in England,<sup>1</sup> had expressed himself with greater freedom. Religion being the chief bond of society, religious quarrels and divisions, he declared, were by so much the more to be contemned; for how many were "averted from the Church to the chair of the scorners" when they heard of such a strife of discordant and contrary doctrines? But regarding the means of procuring unity, if there was little hope from Laodicean accommodations and "witty reconcilements", there was less, he argued, to be gathered from violent coercion. "There be two swords amongst Christians, the spiritual and temporal, and both have their due office. . . . But we may not take up the third sword, which is Mahomet's . . . to propagate religion by wars or by sanguinary persecutions to force consciences"; which, indeed, were "but to dash the first Table against the second". Yet precisely this was the spectacle presented by Christian Europe—by the massacres in France, the powder treason in England, the "furies of the Anabaptists", the murdering of princes, butchery of peoples, and subversion of States. "It was great blasphemy when the Devil said, *I will ascend and be like the Highest*; but it is greater blasphemy to personate God, and bring Him in saying, *I will descend, and be like the Prince of darkness*". And so the Baconian protest against this violent intolerance ends with a vigorous trumpet-blast.

Therefore it is most necessary that the Church by doctrine and decree, Princes by their sword, and all learnings, both Christian and moral, as by their Mercury rod, do damn and send to hell for ever those facts and opinions tending to the support of the same: as hath been already in good part done.

"Those facts and opinions"—how the princely sword could cleave an opinion and leave untouched the head that housed it, was another matter.

But to return to Descartes: if Religion was problematical, so also was the Philosophy of the schools. For hundreds of years (he reflected) it had been cultivated, and by the best minds that ever lived; nevertheless no single thing was to be found in it that was not the subject of dispute. It was all

<sup>1</sup> Essays, *Of Unity in Religion*.



disquieting enough; an altogether disturbing world for a youth with something of the sensibility and intellectual sensitivity of genius. Externally, Europe was rocking with violent controversies, civil commotions and wars, and his own inner world was awash with every sort of uncertainty. But it brought him to decision. He resolved to drop his textbooks and "seek knowledge by studying within himself". He resolved also to travel abroad. "I employed the rest of my youth in travel, in seeing courts and armies, in intercourse with men . . . in proving myself by the various predicaments in which I was placed by fortune, and under all circumstances bringing my mind to bear on the things which came before it". His health by now had improved, he had learnt fencing and horsemanship, and he rode to the wars as a soldier of fortune: first in the Netherlands, in the army of Prince Maurice, then in Bohemia with the Bavarian army, and finally in Hungary.

Of the crisis that directed him to philosophy and determined his career more will be said presently, but the rules which he drew up thereafter may be quoted here. That he might not omit, he says, to carry on his life as happily as possible he drew up a code of morals, consisting of a few simple maxims.

The first was to obey the laws and customs of my country, adhering constantly to the religion in which, by God's grace, I had been instructed since my childhood, and in all other things directing my conduct by opinions the most moderate in nature and the farthest removed from excess. . . . My second maxim was that of being as firm and resolute in my actions as I could be. . . . My third was to try always to conquer myself rather than fortune, and to alter my desires rather than change the order of the world. . . . And last of all . . . I thought I could not do better than [continue to occupy] . . . my whole life in cultivating my reason and in advancing myself as much as possible in the knowledge of the truth. . . .

It was in keeping with this last resolve that, in 1629, at the age of thirty-three, he withdrew into Holland, a Protestant country, and secluded himself. Try as he would, however, he could not wholly escape the distractions of controversy, for it seethed around him everywhere. Galileo, Bruno, Campanella, many more, had suffered imprisonment or death for their

opinions, and if he himself was resolved not to join the band of martyrs, his days were none the less anxious and troubled, and he withdrew deeper into himself. "The truth must be veiled", he confessed, and added that he himself "wore a mask". And perhaps his portrait confirms it. His deeply lined face, with its hooded, brooding, not too friendly eyes, its slightly sardonic mouth, was not a candid one. He solaced himself with friendly correspondence with distinguished and sympathetic people, particularly with Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the Elector Palatine, but in Amsterdam he liked to think himself unknown. So he wrote to a friend:

In this great town where I now am, there being not a soul but myself not engaged in commerce, all are so engrossed in their affairs that I could pass my whole life unnoticed by anyone. I stroll every day amid the Babel of a great thoroughfare with as much freedom and repose as you could find in the walks of your garden, and look on the people I pass just as I should on the trees in your forests or the animals in your pastures. The noise of their babblings does not disturb my reflections more than the babbling of a stream <sup>1</sup>

"The distinguished M. Descartes"—that was how he came to be styled by his acquaintances; "distinguished" certainly, but, save to his few chosen intimates, politely reserved and something of a man of mystery. Yet he was no mere abstraction or all-but-disembodied intellect, and when his natural child, a girl of six, died, his grief was piteous and undisguised.

So he lived on, for the most part in Holland, until in 1649 he entered into correspondence with Queen Christina of Sweden. Her Majesty was not yet twenty, but commendably eager for knowledge, and solicitous just now that the distinguished M. Descartes should direct her to a philosophic analysis of Love. So the correspondence prospered, until presently nothing would do but he must go to Stockholm and continue his instructions in person. Which accordingly, in the autumn of 1649, he did, and her young Majesty was very gracious, and insisted on M. Descartes composing a ballet for her and instructing her every morning, at five o'clock, on how to live happily. Descartes had been a late riser from his earliest

<sup>1</sup> S. V. Keeling, *Descartes*, 1934, p. 14.

days; he was now fifty-four, and the Swedish winter was bitter.

He suffered crucially with the cold: [and] the thoughts of the people of this [Swedish] country, he said, chilled him as did the water. . . . He took cold as he was going from the embassy to the court, and fell seriously ill. Christina sent a German doctor to attend him, whom he believed to be his enemy and received unwillingly. When the doctor desired to bleed him, he said, "You shall not shed a drop of French blood"; and he would accept nothing but a homely remedy which consisted of a weak infusion of tobacco in a warm drink. The fever became more intense; the lungs were affected; on the 11th of February 1650, at four in the morning, after having dictated a letter to his brothers commending his old nurse to their care, and after receiving the religious offices with fervour, he exclaimed, "Now, my soul, it is time to depart!" He then breathed his last <sup>1</sup>

A century later Mr. Swedenborg of Stockholm, during one of his many visits to the World of Spirits, met a select number of discarnate Cartesians and was pleasantly impressed with their discourse. Some distance away he thought he recognized the spirit of M. Descartes himself, crowned with laurels and standing beside Aristotle (and Leibnitz): so that, in the World of Spirits, it seemed as if the opposition between the Old and the New Philosophies was not irreconcilable. But in this mortal world, at least, it was otherwise. Descartes had opened the door to scientific positivism, and thenceforth, for successive centuries, Man the Thinker was to assert his claim to conquer reality for himself.

## 2

It was during the years of his military service that Descartes passed through his first great intellectual crisis. In the second part of his *Discourse on Method* he tells the story of it.

I was then in Germany, to which country I had been attracted by the wars. . . . And as I was returning from the coronation of the Emperor to join the army, the setting in of winter detained me in a quarter where, since I found no society to divert me, while,

<sup>1</sup> J. Chevalier, *Descartes*, Paris, 1921 (quoted by R. M. Eaton, *Descartes*, 1927, p. xxx).

fortunately, I had also no cares or passions to trouble me, I remained the whole day shut up alone in a stove-heated room, where I had complete leisure to occupy myself with my own thoughts.

What happened to him in those long winter days and nights of musing beside that now famous Bavarian stove we shall shortly consider. But before this, apparently about the end of 1619, something had occurred in his mental life which indicated that already the internal struggle was moving to a crisis. He had, he tells us, three consecutive dreams which, as we should now say, dramatized the inward conflict through which he was passing: and, like Swedenborg a century later, he treated dreams seriously.

First he dreamed that a violent wind, an ill wind, was forcing him, against his own resistance, toward his old Jesuit college at La Flèche, or rather, toward the door of the college chapel. He awoke in great agitation and gave thanks for the relief, for it had been as if an evil spirit was in the wind. It is not difficult to guess that what was here dramatized was an urge to take religious vows, an urge which, he felt, had not the true motive behind it. So at least he seems to have interpreted it. One ought not to submit, he reflects, to be carried away, even into a holy place, by a spirit that is not of the highest. The same night in another dream he thought he was offered the choice of two books, the one an anthology (the kind of volume which, in those times, would be made up of compilations from the Schoolmen and the Fathers), the other a book of poetry; and he chose the book of poetry. Perhaps it symbolized his rejection of Scholastic lore for freer flights of the mind. But between these two dreams, the first and last, was a second. It was, in a sense, a terror dream. He awoke, he tells us, to a flash of lightning and a crash of thunder, and although the dream-imagery is not described, he tells us that it meant for him remorse for sin, and the descent of the Divine Spirit.

There seems to be nothing of similar sort in Descartes's later accounts of himself; but these recorded dreams plainly indicate not only an intellectual but also a religious conflict. It appears that Descartes himself regarded them as, in some sort, signs from the world of spirit. And this is noteworthy,

because the Descartes whom we know, whom history knows, was neither a saint nor a visionary, nor even a deeply religious man, and certainly he was not of the stuff of which martyrs are made. He had, it is true, nothing of the worldliness and love of show and of intrigue which we found in Bacon; but he was nevertheless very much a man of this world, desiring to live on tolerable terms with it, and to be left alone to pursue his own intellectual interests. And because the Catholic Church was a part, and a very powerful part, of this world, he desired to live on tolerable terms with the Church also. He was not averse from stirring up controversies; he did so frequently and inevitably; but, for the most part, he contrived to avoid persecution. His much-criticized attitude to Galileo was an instance of this. When he learned that Galileo's books had been burned at Rome and Galileo himself imprisoned, he was careful to withhold a treatise of his own on the theory of the earth's motion. And yet it is difficult to resist the belief that Descartes felt that his life was, in some sort, a mission—that it was a sense of vocation which gave it direction: so that, later, in 1629, we find him retiring to Holland to give himself to his work in as cloister-like a seclusion as he could obtain.

We return, then, to the crisis that developed while he was still in the army, and musing beside that Bavarian stove. We have seen that what tormented him was his thirst, not for learning but for *knowledge*, the knowledge by which, as he says, he might discern between the true and the false, and, seeing clearly, walk with assurance in this present life. And soon it came to him that he had felt his way to a *method* which gave promise of obtaining for him that which he so vehemently desired. Put in briefest terms, the method was one of *simplification*. His education had introduced him to an immense accumulation of complicated propositions, and the more abstruse and complicated they were, the greater, it appeared, was their excellence, and the greater also the virtue of mastering them. Thus progress in learning was progress from the simple to the complicated, and from the complicated to the still more complicated, and so onward. It now came to him that the true method worked in exactly the reverse direction. He must seek to reduce involved and obscure propositions to those that

were simpler, and the simpler to the simpler still, until at last he reached the *absolutely simple*, which could be apprehended, not by any process of ratiocination, but *immediately*—literally so, *without mediation*; so that the simple proposition, lying as it were directly upon the mind, communicated itself directly to the consciousness as something that *was so*, and *must be so*. True knowledge, he was persuaded, could be won in no other way. He could be sure only of that which was immediately and distinctly and clearly known to his consciousness; and having attained, by this process of simplification, to the knowledge of any one thing, he must attempt, by precisely the same process, to attain to the knowledge of other things, and systematize the results. Such was the method; and he now proposed to himself to put it to the proof.

The first great act in this enterprise was an act of Doubt. "Patience to doubt" had been named in Bacon's enumeration of the intellectual virtues; but Descartes's was perhaps the most deliberate and thorough-going act of doubt in the history of thought. It was a voluntary *catharsis*, an intellectual *via negativa*, an act not only of the intellect but also of the will. Just as young Francis of Assisi vowed himself to Poverty in nudity of body, so young Descartes vowed himself to Truth in stark nudity of mind. He would strip off every shred of traditional belief; every received opinion, all the doctrines of the schools. He himself described it by a different figure. He likened it to an act of demolition. A man finds that the house in which he has lived is unsatisfactory, and instead of patching it up here and there, he decides that it must all come down, to make room for another and better. He does not destroy the material; that may still be useful; but the house itself is demolished.

It follows that this act of doubt was in fact an act of faith. Certainly it had not the remotest affinity to that flippant scepticism with which most of us are familiar, and which Descartes himself rightly scorned—the scepticism of the third-rate mind that doubts in order to doubt. Descartes, on the contrary, doubted in order to believe. "My whole intention", as he says, "was to arrive at certainty, to dig away the drift and sand until I reached the rock". Behind his doubting was the persuasion that there really were firm foundations,

solid and rational convictions, if only he could dig down to them.

Descartes began by doubting the validity of the sense-perceptions, as the Greeks had done before him—eyes and ears, as Heracleitus put it, being but poor witnesses. The vividness of our sensations is no proof that delusion does not lie behind them. Our sight and hearing, even our sense of touch, may and do deceive us, and in our dreams we see and hear and feel imaginary things as if they were real. On the other hand, there seemed to be solid ground in the universal truths of mathematics. Whatever might be the phantasmagoria of our dreams and the illusions of our senses generally, it must still be true, everywhere and always, that  $2+3$  make 5, or that a square has four sides. Regarding such things doubt seemed impossible.

But presently, standing precariously on this one islet of rational certainty, Descartes found that the engulfing tide was still rising. It may "stand to reason" that  $2+3$  make 5, and we may be so constituted as rational beings that we are bound to think so; but how do we know, really *know*, that the things which "stand to reason" are really so? *How can we be sure that Reason itself can be trusted?* What if her certificate be false? It would be a nightmare thought, the notion that reason functioned in man only as an organ of deception; but how do we *know* that it does not? What if, behind the world, lies some demoniacal Power that has made man for its own sport and implanted in him this organ of reason for no other purpose than to befool him? So Descartes, marooned on this crumbling islet of mathematical certainty, was swept off his last refuge into the welter. His world had finally disappeared in the universal deluge of Doubt.

Then it was, in this last extremity, that the Ark appeared, riding the flood. For in this crisis Descartes discovered irrefragable certainty as something that proved itself even by means of the very process of doubting. For consider: a person may delude himself, or be deluded, in unnumbered ways. His very acts—walking, eating, talking—may all be imaginary, the stuff of dreams. But even so, the fact that he imagines these things cannot itself be imaginary. If it is all a dream, at least a dream it is, *and he is the dreamer*. For even a dream,

even a delusion, even a doubt, is a mental occurrence and can proceed only from a thinking mind. This was the moment of deliverance. Here at last was indubitable certainty. "*Cogito ergo sum!*" ("I think, therefore I am!")

It is worth while to recall that this demonstration which had, for Descartes, all the novelty of a personal discovery, had been traced by Augustine a thousand years earlier. In his treatise on the Trinity (x. 14) the Christian Father argues that every mind knows certainly and immediately the fact of its own activity and therefore its own existence. Men, he says, certainly have doubted the source and secret of their power of loving, remembering, thinking, knowing, judging; but

who ever doubts that he himself lives, and remembers, and understands, and wills, and thinks, and knows, and judges? Seeing that even if he doubts he lives, if he doubts he remembers why he doubts, if he doubts he understands that he doubts, if he doubts he thinks, if he doubts he knows that he does not know.

It is the same Cartesian argument. The activity of my mind—understanding, feeling, doubting, or whatever it be—proves, says Descartes, that I, a conscious being, exist: and it does so, primarily, not by any logical process, but by the very activity itself, which involves an immediate, clear and distinct awareness of myself. Thinking or feeling is an activity which cannot possibly exist without a substance that acts—that is, the thinking, feeling *ego*. "I think" necessarily implies "I am".

In this way, then, Descartes found his first foothold in certainty. And it is important to note that this foothold is specifically his *assured consciousness of himself*. It is important because it means that Descartes, as the father of modern philosophy, took his stand on the side of philosophic idealism. For idealism, in the philosophic sense, and as opposed to realism, is rooted in self-consciousness and maintains that our knowledge of any object is conditioned by our own mind as the knowing subject. Idealism, in other words, begins with the person who thinks and knows, and then, passing to the object that is thought and known, affirms that the two are fundamentally interrelated; so that we cannot know what any



object is, except as it exists in the mind of the knowing subject. Realism, on the other hand, contends that the object is independent of the knowing subject and remains the same, whether it is known or not, its existence being wholly in itself. In modern theology also, as well as philosophy, this Cartesian emphasis has been significant; for it has given us a school of interpretation for which nothing is religiously valid save as it can be produced from our own immediate feeling. Such a way of thinking demands that theology shall be "rooted in experience", and that doctrine shall be an "interpretation" of experience.

But now we have Descartes in his ark of refuge. He has got aboard his unsinkable certainty which rides the deluge of doubt. But after all, it was only an ark, and a very circumscribed one; and what he needed was a restored world. He had now to send out his winged thought over the great desolation to find if there was any firm ground on which he could land. Or, to drop the figure, what he now needed, having attained to assurance of his own existence, was the assurance that what reason reported to him concerning the world in general was also reliable. He needed to know that reason itself was trustworthy. And to this he attained by a process which can be briefly traced.

According to Descartes's first principle, he could be sure of whatever was immediately and distinctly and clearly known to his consciousness. He now recognized that what was thus immediately present to his mind was, not only his awareness of his own being, but also *his awareness that his being was imperfect*. This was, for him, as immediate a consciousness as his consciousness of himself. But whence had it come? Obviously the sense of imperfection is impossible without a prior sense of *perfection*—and in this case, perfection of *being*. But whence had come this idea of perfection of being? Just as obviously, this could not have originated in himself, for the ground of it was not in him. It could have come only from Perfect Being itself. In short, Descartes discovered that behind his immediate awareness of himself, and of himself as a limited, imperfect being, lay the innate, divinely implanted idea of God. So that Descartes did not hesitate to affirm that, in this sense, his consciousness of God took precedence of his consciousness of

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himself. And if we object that the *idea* of God does not necessarily imply the *existence* of God, Descartes replies (like Anselm in a much earlier controversy) that in this fundamental instance, *idea* and *being* are indivisible. Such was the famous Cartesian "Metaphysical Proof", though its actual importance for Descartes is a matter of debate.

What, then, follows? What followed for Descartes was that the Demon-hypothesis—the nightmare supposition that some malign force might have implanted reason in man specifically as an organ of deception—fell away. Instead there was the assurance of God: and He, the Perfect One, the source and consummation of all good, could not have given us reason in order to deceive us. All His gifts must be good gifts. So now, with this threefold certainty, the assurance of God, the assurance of himself, and the assurance of the validity of reason, the world was before him. To build upon these fundamental certainties by means of that selfsame method which had yielded him these results—this was now his task.

## 3

Nothing, however, could be more misleading than the inference that the crisis which we have here described, and the conclusions which emerged from it, give us the clue to the general temper and character of Descartes's philosophy. If this were so we should rightly suppose that its main preoccupations were metaphysical and psychological, whereas it was Descartes's mechanistic interpretation of Nature which chiefly influenced modern thought; and this interpretation, as T. H. Huxley could fairly claim, opened the door to modern materialism. But on this account it is all the more important to bear in mind that at least Descartes was not himself a materialist. Just as he had claimed, in his Metaphysical Proof, that our consciousness of God underlies our consciousness of our own being, so he came to argue that our knowledge of the soul, or mind, is more assured than our knowledge of the body. For "even bodies", he says, "are not, properly speaking, known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding only; and since they are not known from the fact that they are seen or

touched, but only because they are understood, I see clearly that there is nothing that is easier for me to know than my mind ”.

Further, Descartes believed in the freedom of the will. He found that even in the very act of doubting he was exercising his free will; and, in relation to the mind's quest of truth, he has much to say about it. First, there is the *freedom of indifference*—not moral apathy but intellectual impartiality, the deliberate poise of a judgment balanced between alternative opinions. Then there is the *higher freedom* which comes when reasons gather around the mind and move it toward a certain conclusion. “ I move the more freely toward an object in proportion to the number of reasons that compel me ”. Thus, he says, there may come a stage at which a man's mind is so much in thrall to rational conviction that he is no longer “ free ” to doubt: and this incapacity is the larger liberty. But, in the realm of ethics, he recognizes that freedom of will requires no central point of indifference at all; for morally a man's will is free only in order that he may choose the right. The more we are drawn to some particular moral choice, whether for the reason that we find it self-evident that the good and the true lie in that direction, or because “ God has so disposed our inner thoughts ”, then (he argues) the more freely do we choose it.

We may compare this with T. H. Huxley's famous confession (made, incidentally, in his discourse on Descartes): “ I protest that if some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of my being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer ”<sup>1</sup>—and as instantly, of course, de-moralize himself. But the divine disposition of our inner thoughts that Descartes hypothecates has nothing to do with clockwork; and because clockwork automatism bulks so large in the Cartesian conception of Nature it is as well to note it. What we have in Descartes on the metaphysical side is, in fact, the attempt to cut away from Authority and reconstruct a philosophy of God, Man and the World on the basis of human reason and the human consciousness. That this was done with prudential submission to the Church does

<sup>1</sup> *Lay Sermons*, 1891 edn., p. 296.

not obscure the real nature of the purpose. We have in Descartes the claim of the natural rational man to make his own way in the world, make his own discoveries of reality, and interpret life accordingly.

And now, having obtained his charter of rational liberty to explore the world of things, he turned to this with complete devotion. For, as he explicitly declared, the specific object of his metaphysical argument had been to clear the way for a mathematical interpretation of physics. This was his bent. His intellectual passion was for the positive, definitive and certain, and it was mathematics that was the exact science. (He would have been unsympathetic to Croce's dictum: "There is nothing exact in mathematics except their own exactness"). Qualitative perceptions, resting upon the imagination, might be anything but precise, but quantitative perceptions were distinct, definable, clear. In short, Descartes now set himself, by means of experimental physics, to reconstruct philosophy on a factual, mathematical foundation. And his language is significant

I perceived it to be possible to discover a practical (philosophy) by means of which, knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of Nature.

It is of course the Baconian dream of the coming of the kingdom of Man, and, as with Bacon, there is hardly a hint of any serious doubt of man's moral competence to convert each new conquest, and consequent enlargement of his kingdom, to beneficent ends.

It is important, then, that we observe that henceforth Descartes's thought falls into two parts, the one metaphysical, the other mathematical and mechanistic, and that there is almost a clean cut between the two. On the metaphysical side we have the conception of God as the supreme Perfection, and of man as a rational, spiritual, morally responsible being: on the mathematical, mechanistic side we have the conception of the

physical world; and the only nexus between the two is the idea of Substance—that basic thing which underlies all qualities and activities. Thus, thinking is an activity, and so there must be a *substance* that thinks; materiality is a quality, and there must be a *substance* that is material. God is Substance increate; mind and matter are created substances. The conception of Matter as *extension* follows. What is common to all material bodies is their *extension in space*; and as this extension is susceptible of measurement, it is something that can be geometrically (and thus mathematically) stated. Motion also calls for mathematical statement: for actual motion is “that which brings it about that bodies pass from one place to another and occupy successively all the intervening spaces”. Thus, to repeat, the Cartesian universe falls into two parts. On the one side we have the substance that thinks and has no extension (mind or spirit), and on the other the substance that has extension but does not think (matter); and man’s knowledge of both is founded upon his consciousness of himself.

What is to be noted, therefore, is that, by means of this clean cut between the metaphysical and physical aspects of reality, Descartes was able, without denying the spiritual, to leave the physical world and its phenomena free for purely mechanistic interpretations. Thus he lays it down that where there is no self-consciousness there is nothing but mechanism. Self-consciousness pertains to the soul; the body is a machine: animals, which have no self-consciousness, are (he holds) automata and have no feeling. And so with the body of Nature as a whole and in all its parts: it is all susceptible of mechanistic interpretation. It was this that led T. H. Huxley, addressing the Cambridge Y.M.C.A. in 1870, to claim Descartes as the pioneer of scientific materialism.

Descartes saw that the discoveries of Galileo meant that the remotest parts of the universe were governed by mechanical laws; while those of Harvey meant that the same laws presided over . . . our own bodily frame. And crossing the interval between the centre and its vast circumference by one of the great strides of genius, Descartes sought to resolve all the phenomena of the universe into matter and motion, or forces operating according to law . . . with the effect of arriving at that purely mechanical

view of vital phenomena towards which modern physiology is striving.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, as Huxley went on to claim, Descartes, by founding rational certainty on the immediate consciousness of the thinking man, was the pioneer of that rationalist positivism which, in Huxley's view, had wrested the moral initiative from all forms of dogmatic religion.

## 4

In a now forgotten book of Swedenborg's, the *Animal Kingdom*, written before his illumination, there is a quotable passage on the intelligence of the higher spirits.

The power of divining true principles by the mind alone, and of descending therefrom, in the path of certainty, through their consequences, to posterior things, belongs exclusively to higher beings and powers; to spirits, angels, and the Omniscient Himself, who indeed inhabit the brightest light, and dwell in essential truth and wisdom. They see all things in one complex as at once beneath them and within them; they view the last things from the first, the lowest from the highest, the outermost from the innermost; in a word, all the circumferences from the centre. Not so human minds .<sup>2</sup>

Of the (unfallen) First Man he writes (in his *Principia*):

In a short time so perfect a . . . being would by the senses alone become possessed of all the philosophy and experimental science natural to him: for whatever could present itself to his senses would immediately flow, by connection and contiguity, to his extremely subtle and active [soul]. . . The soul, being furnished with such a body, would naturally be so well acquainted with geometry, mechanics, and the mundane system, as to be able to instruct herself without a master, from the simple contemplation of the phenomena of nature and the objects of sense.<sup>3</sup>

It is with something of all this in mind, but derived not from the Swedish dreamer but from Catholic tradition, that Professor Maritain, in his book, *Three Reformers*, accuses Descartes of *Angelism*. He means that it is Man as Thinker who takes the

<sup>1</sup> *Lay Sermons*, 1891 edn., p. 288.    <sup>2</sup> *Animal Kingdom*, Vol. 1, Prologue.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. 1, pp. 43, 44.

middle of the Cartesian stage, and Man as Thinker not so much on the human plane as on the Angelic or superhuman plane. For M. Maritain argues that Descartes's Man is a thinker whose fundamental ideas have these Angelic characteristics, namely, that they are *intuitive* as to mode, *innate* as to origin, and *independent of things* as to nature. In other words, we might say that Descartes's thinking man, like Swedenborg's higher spirits, has "the power of divining true principles by the mind alone and of descending therefrom on the path of certainty", as from the innermost to the outermost. For the Angelic intellect is (according to Maritain) independent of things in the sense that angels are supposed not to be under the necessity of examining and analysing intelligible objects in order to understand them, because the ideas of these things are already infused into their minds by the Creator, so that they *in-see* them in the light of God. And so Augustine also. God, says Augustine, produced things intelligibly in the knowledge of spirits before producing them materially in their own being.

We may feel, it is true, that this Angelic "independence of things" is the exact contrary of that docile scientific temper and attitude of mind which both Bacon and Descartes advocated. Yet it is not quite so. In his *Discourse on Method* Descartes exhorts men to "exercise that clearness of understanding which has been given them by nature, but which the perceptions of the senses are wont greatly to disturb and obscure". And he means that they must exercise this by examining the *ideas* of things. Examine for example (he says) the *idea* of a square or a rectilinear triangle: you will then observe, when you pass from the idea to any particular square object or triangular object, that all those things which you clearly conceived to be contained in the *nature* of such objects are actually contained in the material objects themselves. This is M. Maritain's "independence of things", and agrees with the Cartesian doctrines of intuition and innate ideas. Certain knowledge rests, for Descartes, not upon deductive, syllogistic reasoning, but upon mental *perception*, upon what we might term open vision, upon a cognition that is direct and immediate, distinct and clear: and as for the deductive process, it is used only for the knitting together of these clarities. This, says Maritain, is good doctrine for Angels,

but not for men. Angels do not syllogize, they perceive. But man—man is not an Angel. That which in man makes reason *reason* is precisely this humbler process of deductive thought; and “to lay hands on the syllogism is to lay hands on human nature”. Therefore Descartes’s Angelism and Angelist psychology are, for Maritain, are bellion against those creaturely conditions in which man finds himself. Which, whatever else we may make of it, is a shrewd statement of the case for the new Scholasticism.

Perhaps, however, it is not that Descartes forgot that man is man and not angel: he forgot that, according to the Faith he himself professed, there has been a Fall. Francis Bacon, as Dr. Niebuhr has pointed out, was afraid lest “the unquietness of the human spirit”—man’s insatiable yearning for the infinite—would “interfere most mischievously in the discovery of causes”, that is, with the progress of inductive science. Descartes sought to offset this interference by making a sharp cleavage between the natural world and the spiritual world. The spiritual world was left to God and Faith, the natural world to Man and Reason. and within this natural sphere man’s reason was sovereign and final. This was a distinction that led directly to the naturalism and materialistic positivism and rationalism of the eighteenth century, in which Man the Thinker was to assert his claim to conquer reality for himself.

Against this claim, already incipient in Cartesianism, the Christian Faith set its question-mark, or rather its positive denial. For the Christian doctrine of the Fall, however interpreted, means that Man is a sinner: he is a sinner not only in relation to the spiritual world, but *as man*, in all his relations; and as such his reason, no less than his will, and his reason in relation to Nature not less than in relation to spiritual reality, partakes of the perversions and disabilities of moral evil, and particularly of pride, self-interest, and self-sufficiency. Marx, in the nineteenth century, was forward to recognize this taint of self-interest and concupiscence as impairing the validity of all *bourgeois* philosophies and ideologies (though not, of course, of Marxism). The *bourgeois* thinker, by reason of his *bourgeois* bias, could not think straight. The Christian affirmation is that *Man* cannot “think straight”, and that, in all his explorations of



reality, a certain humility becomes him, not merely as a finite creature, but as a sinner.

No doubt ecclesiastical authoritarianism, no less than Marxism, has sought to make its own particular exception to this general rule, but the rule stands, and the exceptions fall. Descartes had no thought for this. By interpreting Man in terms of mind and Nature in terms of mechanics, he encouraged his age to lay claim to a kingdom in which man's own power and sovereignty should be complete. Only now and again in his writings can we discern the shadow of fear—the fear lest man's mastery should fail for lack of self-mastery and his sovereign powers be turned to destructive ends for lack of moral vision and ethical control. It is this dualistic Cartesian tradition, this “bifurcation of the universe” as between substance and qualities, spirit and nature, life and matter, mind and body—that is, between what science proposes to take account of and what it proposes to ignore—that Whitehead specially criticizes. It has had, he contends, the result of reproducing something of the same limitations that dominated Medieval Scholasticism, while losing to rationalistic thought some of the finer values which Scholasticism conserved. To this criticism we shall return (see p. 208).

## 4

### SPINOZA

DESCARTES had built his new philosophy upon the foundation of self-certainty—" *I think, therefore I am* ". He had not long been dead before what had seemed to him to be an incontestable axiom, the foundation of all knowledge, was subjected to radical criticism, notably by British thinkers. John Locke (b. 1632) agreed that our knowledge of our own states of mind is, for us, the most certain of all. According to Locke, however, this knowledge, being founded upon *sensation*—upon the activities of our bodily senses—does not tell us *what* things are, but only *that* they are; what we know is the *impression* that things have made upon our minds through our organs of sense. The mind can know only its own ideas. In this way Locke differed from Descartes about self-certainty. For Descartes it meant a metaphysical assurance of his own ego *as essential substance*; for Locke it meant a "psychological" awareness of his own mental activity, and it told him nothing about "essential substance" at all. The "*I think*" which appeared to Descartes to justify the addition, "*therefore I am*", appeared to Locke to justify nothing more than "*therefore I have an inward sense of a certain thought-process now going on*".

This criticism (which rejected also the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas) was carried to its logical extreme by David Hume (b. 1711); that is, it was carried to the point at which "substance" was denied altogether. For Descartes, the "I" had been the substantial ego; for Locke, it meant a psychological awareness; for Hume, it meant "*nothing but a bundle of different perceptions which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement*". In other words, Hume atomized Descartes's *ego* into a mere stream of perceptions, an activity without a "substance" at all.

In this way the impetus toward rationalistic positivism which

Descartes had initiated had turned against the Cartesian position. Man the thinker had been dissolved into a perceptual flux, and his world had likewise dissolved around him. For the radical rationalism of Hume could not concede any knowledge of cause and effect (and much less could it concede design) in Nature. What we observe in time and space is an endless succession of phenomena. If we read into these sequences the notion of cause and effect, we are simply interpolating inter-linear inferences which we cannot know to be true. It was not, perhaps, an exhilarating world-view, nor was it a body of doctrine that offered the compensation of superior moral empowerments, by means of which mankind could brace themselves against so bleak a prospect. It was like contemplating an Ice Age and being warned at the same time of a fuel-shortage. But Hume himself, with characteristic candour, was prompt to admit it. At the end of his treatise on the Understanding he confesses:

The understanding, when it acts alone and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, either in philosophy or in common life . . . The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all human reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? . . . Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or, who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, he reflects, life itself provides an escape from philosophy, and nature comes to the rescue of reason. "I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends"; and, when these begin to pall, there is escape from this also—back into philosophy. Nothing could be more candid and engaging. And in any case the quest of truth had to be pursued whithersoever it might lead. But it was hardly to be supposed that, at this stage, those who had believed that reason is not the only organ that certifies Reality, and who had

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise of Human Nature*, Everyman's Library edn., Vol. 1, pp. 25254.

stood for the tradition of Faith, should have felt moved, by an irresistible obligation to Humanity, to surrender their flag to this new movement of Progress.

## 1

But already, in Descartes's own lifetime, another thinker of like stature had appeared on the Continent. For in 1632, while Descartes was philosophizing in Amsterdam, Baruch de Spinoza was born in that city. The son of Portuguese Jews who had sought refuge in Holland, he had early drifted away from the orthodox faith of Jewry and, in sign of it, had changed his first name from Baruch to its Latin equivalent, Benedictus. Such secessions were often made for worldly reasons, but Spinoza was innocent of this motive. Since Socrates, philosophy has never known a spirit more unworldly, or a mind of loftier integrity, than this outcast of the Hebrew synagogue. When the synagogue authorities assured him of a handsome pension if he retained his formal connection with Jewish orthodoxy, he declined the offer and was duly excommunicated. When, in consequence, his family denied him a share in his father's property, he made good his legal claim to it and then surrendered it. When a young Dutch admirer desired to bequeath him a fortune, he forbade it. When he was promised a substantial acknowledgment if he would inscribe a treatise to Louis XIV, he rejected the suggestion. When the Elector Palatine offered him a Heidelberg professorship, he refused the offer, fearing lest such a post would hinder the development and expression of his thought. Rejecting worldly emoluments seemed to have become a habit with him, and though he was persuaded at length to accept a modest annuity, he preferred to live on a few pence a day and earn his bread by grinding and polishing lenses. This he did, and Spinoza's lenses were sought after as the best in the market.

He was twenty-four and weak in health when the Jewish rabbis, embittered by his secession, obtained his expulsion from Amsterdam. His formal excommunication from the commonwealth of Israel had already been pronounced in the Spanish synagogue with the usual dread solemnities and the blowing of the *Shofar* horn, and an attempt to assassinate him had been made by certain zealots. For a while he remained in

the neighbourhood of the city, lodging with a humble family of Dutch pietists. Later he moved to Rhynsburg, near Leyden, and then to The Hague. He suffered much, and lived alone, though there is the story of a broken romance with the daughter of his old Latin master. But if he had the heart of a lover and the unworldliness of a saint, he had also the fortitude of a Stoic. To set his portrait alongside the portrait of Descartes is to note the contrast. Spinoza's is the face of a poet or artist (and in fact he is supposed to have taken drawing lessons from Rembrandt): it lacks nothing of assurance, but it has a grace and candour which one misses in Descartes's. He died at the age of forty-five.

## 2

Before considering something of Spinoza's philosophy, we shall turn to an early tractate of his on the Interpretation of the Scriptures—a treatise which, without being of philosophical importance, has special interest because of its bearing upon later Biblical Criticism. We have to remember that he was brought up an orthodox Jew, taught to believe in the verbal inspiration of the Old Testament and given a sound rabbinical training. We have also to remember that he lived in Protestant Holland at a time when Protestants—both Calvinists and Lutherans—held to the verbal infallibility of the Bible over against the rejected doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope. Spinoza himself, when he cut loose from Judaism, became neither a Protestant nor a Catholic, but set himself to the independent study of the Bible. It is of more than ordinary interest to observe how a mind so penetrating, so well equipped, and so free from theological or party prejudice, would react to this study.

He begins by stating that what determined him to examine the Bible afresh was a contemplation of the decay of piety in the religious world.

Matters have long since come to such a pass that one can pronounce a man Christian, Turk, Jew, or Heathen only by his general appearance and attire, by his frequenting this or that place of worship, or employing the phraseology of a particular

sect—as for manner of life, it is in all cases the same. . . . Every church becomes a theatre where orators, instead of church teachers, harangue, caring not to instruct the people, but striving to attract admiration, to bring opponents to public scorn, and to preach only novelties and paradoxes such as will tickle the ears of their congregation . . . Verily, if they had but one spark of light from on high, they would not insolently rave, but would learn to worship God more wisely, and would be as marked among their fellows for mercy as they are now for malice.

Therefore he was resolved to examine the Bible afresh in an impartial and unfettered spirit, approaching it with no pre-suppositions, and attributing to it no doctrines which he himself did not find clearly set forth in its pages. Here we have Bacon's approach to Nature directed to the sacred text, and, in fact, Spinoza consciously appropriates the method. How, he asks, do we interpret Nature? and answers, By *examining* Nature, and by arriving at definitions of natural phenomena according to certain fixed axioms. In the same way, Scriptural interpretation should proceed by the examination of the text and by inferring the intention of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental principles. In short, the knowledge of Scripture must be obtained from Scripture itself. "The universal rule, then, in interpreting Scripture, is to accept nothing as an authoritative Scriptural statement which we do not perceive very clearly when we examine it in the light of history".

But what he means by "the light of history" is important: for although modern Biblical Criticism is generally dated from Samuel Reimarus, who died in 1699, it is clear that Spinoza anticipated him. For Spinoza means by "the light of history" three things. First, the knowledge of the nature and properties of the languages in which the Biblical books were written; second, the analysis of each book, and arrangement of its contents, including a note of "all obscure or contradictory passages"; and third, a knowledge of the particular environment of each book, by which he means the life and times of the author, the occasion of his writing, the character of the people addressed, and the number of versions through which the writings passed. "When we are in possession of this history . . .

it will be time to gird ourselves for the task of investigating the mind of the Prophets and of the Holy Spirit ”.

When he comes to the question of revelation he is surprisingly modern. Revelation he says can be nothing but “sure knowledge revealed by God to man”. Ordinary knowledge may be said to be divine, but the prophet is the subject of revelation only in so far as he is given knowledge which mankind could not ordinarily perceive or apprehend. On the other hand, *the nature of the human mind itself* is the prime condition of revelation. It was by means of their natural endowment of *imagination* that the prophets received it, and, in accordance with this, the power of prophecy in them was fitful, not constant. But (he continues) if they were endowed with unusually active and vivid imagination, it by no means followed that they possessed perfect intellects. Men of strong imagination who give the rein to that power may be, in fact, less fitted for abstract reasoning than their less imaginative fellows. It is a mistake therefore, he argues, to regard the subjects of revelation as persons specially learned in the things of this world, or as authorities in the sphere of, for example, natural science. In this respect a clear distinction must be made between the office of religion, which is to purify the heart and build up the character, and the office of philosophy or the sciences, which is to inform the intellect. Moreover, the Scriptures show that the prophets varied, not only in imagination and temperament, but also in *opinion*, and their prophecies varied accordingly. Thus also the individual *style* of an Ezekiel or an Amos reflected his own personal characteristics and culture.

But imagination (he points out) does not, in its own nature, involve any *certainty* of truth. How then were the prophets assured that what they perceived was true revelation? He replies that their certitude was not mathematical but moral. It is true that what was communicated to them was frequently accompanied by signs; but signs, according to the testimony of Scripture, were not in themselves infallible evidences of divinity, for false prophets also could point to them. The element of certainty lay, therefore, on the moral side.

The upshot of his argument, then, thus far, is that it is a false view of the Bible that regards it as an infallible repository

of scientific truth, its purpose being quite other than this, namely, the purification of heart and life. "God adapted revelations to the understanding and opinions of the Prophets and . . . in matters of theory . . . the Prophets could be, and in fact were, ignorant, and held conflicting opinions. It therefore follows that we must by no means go to the Prophets for knowledge either of natural or spiritual phenomena". We must go to them, instead, for the moral and spiritual *substance* of revelation, and not for details.

What of Miracles? Here again Spinoza's attitude challenged the prevailing religious opinion. We must, he held, accept the general assertion of Scripture that Nature's course is fixed by Divine decree. Regarding Nature, not merely as matter and its modifications, but as comprising the universal order, the living totality of things indwelt by the Divine life and power, we may say, he contends, that this fixity and unchangeableness of Nature's laws is an expression of the eternal consistency of God. And if this is so the conclusion is dictated that what we call miracles are natural occurrences. They took place within the universal order and ought not to be regarded as suspensions or contraventions of that order. But as to this, he concludes, everyone is free to hold the view he thinks best and "most likely to conduce to the worship of God, and to single-hearted religion".

In all this Spinoza has been dealing with the Old Testament, and perhaps it is in his summing up of the general and fundamental doctrines of the Law and the Prophets, which is only lightly sketched, that his spiritual insight strangely fails him. As in the examination of natural phenomena we try first, he reminds us, to investigate what is most general and common in all Nature, so in Bible study we must seek first for those teachings that serve for the foundation of all Scripture; and it is here, when he inquires what doctrines the Scriptures everywhere and clearly teach—so clearly that none need ever be in doubt as to their meaning—that his insight appears to falter. For he is content to instance the doctrines that God is One, that He is omnipotent, that He alone should be worshipped, that He has a care for all men, and that "He particularly loves those who adore Him and who love their neighbours", etc. It is from



such universals, he declares, that other doctrines regarding the general conduct of life flow, like rivulets from their sources; so that the difficulty of interpretation arises from no defect in human reason but simply from the carelessness, neglect or malice of men. But we may feel that to cite, even cursorily, these fundamentals, and to leave out of all account the redeeming grace of God for sinful men who do *not* adore Him but rebel against Him, is to miss the supreme significance of the Old Testament. We may feel that it is precisely here, in this doctrine of redemption, that the Old Testament, with its cry of wonderment, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" points toward the fuller revelation to come: and Spinoza's omission of it is by no means covered by his postulating the Divine care for all men.

The New Testament Spinoza does not examine with the same particularity, for which omission he pleads an indifferent knowledge of Greek; but his conclusions can be filled out from his private letters. In the first place, his attitude to the question of Miracles prevented his acceptance of the doctrine of the Incarnation, as credally interpreted, and also the doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection. "I accept Christ's Passion, death, and burial literally as you do", he writes to his friend Oldenberg, "but His resurrection I understand allegorically"; though he recognizes that the Apostles and the Primitive Church believed it literally. In this, he remarks, they might, without injury to Gospel teaching, have been mistaken; which leads him to a general conclusion:

The truth of an historical narrative, however assured, cannot give us the knowledge, nor consequently the love, of God: for love of God springs from knowledge of Him, and knowledge of Him should be derived from general ideas, in themselves certain and known; so that the truth of an historical narrative is very far from being a necessary requisite for our attaining our highest good.

But he admits that history may be a valuable aid. And incidentally, though he had stumbled at the formal dogma of the Incarnation, he came to hold, philosophically, that matter is the body of God. "I do not know", he declares, "why

### SPINOZA

matter should be unworthy of the divine nature". In the treatise proper he affirms the uniqueness of Christ as the Voice and Wisdom of God and the Way of life; and near the end of his life he penned a confession to Oldenberg:

I will tell you that I do not think it necessary for salvation to know Christ according to the flesh; but with respect to the Eternal Son of God, that is the Eternal Wisdom of God, which has manifested itself in all things, and especially in the human mind, and above all in Christ Jesus, the case is far otherwise. For without this no one can come to a state of blessedness.

We may feel that Spinoza never fully recognized the fact that, rightly or wrongly, both Judaism and Christianity are fundamentally historical Faiths; not merely Faiths with an historical setting (as they had to be), but Faiths really rooted in History and drawing it up into their own spiritual element. Or, to put the statement the other way round, Spinoza, for all his Monistic leanings, never appreciated the fact that History itself has its eternal ontological aspect as partaking (as Berdyaev has it) of the divine dynamism of Being: hence his desire to sublimate Christianity into a religion of pure ideas. And this brings us to Spinoza's philosophy, as such—that is, to his attempt, independent of all revelational sources, to build up a rational interpretation of reality and an ethical way of life.

### 3

Spinoza, who was familiar with Descartes's writings from his youth, took over the Cartesian method but carried it far beyond the limits of Descartes's conclusions. Descartes, as we have noted, worked from the Complex to the Simple. The first "simple" for him was Thought, or self-conscious activity. The second was Substance, the ego being the substance of which thought was the activity. The third was Extension. Matter, as that which occupies space, must have extension in space, and therefore be reducible to geometric terms. A fourth was Motion: and by the famous Metaphysical Proof, God, as Eternal Substance, guaranteed all Descartes, however, was

content to leave these "simples" as ultimates. He left them, in fact, as two disjunctive orders of reality which might be subsumed under the two heads of Thought and Extension, or Mind and Matter. Matter is unconscious and mechanistic; Mind is conscious and not mechanistic. Individual material substances are distinguished by different spatial modes—form, size, location, movement; individual minds are distinguished by non-spatial modes—ideas, judgments, volitions. It was by leaving on one side the category of Mind and concentrating upon material substances divisible into spatial particles that Descartes opened the way to new discoveries in physical science.

Spinoza went much further than this. He begins, in fact, with a more radical question than the one that had set Descartes upon his philosophic quest. Descartes's question was, in effect, How can I know with certainty *what is*? Spinoza's question is, How do I know that anything is, at all? And he finds he knows it because it is completely inconceivable that there should be *nothing*. But if there is a necessary Something, if there *must* be a *that-which-is*, then it has the nature of that "Is-ness" which is the substance of everything. There is thus one universal Substance, and all other things in the universe, whether they belong to Thought or to Extension, are its modes and attributes. The unconscious things that occupy space, and the conscious things that are non-spatial, are alike modes of the one, all-inclusive, essential Substance.

Here we have a conception of Reality which carries us back to Parmenides, but with an important difference. For whereas the Greek thinker, postulating one single Is-ness, denied any plurality of existences—denied that other things could exist at all—Spinoza made no such denial. According to Parmenides our notion of a universe full of a number of things—full of movement, and subject to change—is all illusory; there is no plurality, variety, motion or change. Reality is simple and single Is-ness. Spinoza, on the contrary, by no means denies the reality of a complex universe; what he does deny is that it has any substantial existence apart from the One Substance in which all its parts cohere. And this Substance is Divine. God is both Thought and Extension, both Mind and Matter; God

is All, and All is God. This undoubtedly spells Pantheism, though Spinoza does not use the term. For as Henotheism means belief in one God supreme over other gods, and Monotheism means belief in one single God, and as Deism affirms a creator-deity transcendent above the universe, and Theism affirms that God is both transcendent above the universe and immanent in it, so Pantheism, denying the Divine transcendence and affirming Divine immanence, identifies God with the universe: and this is what Spinoza does.

God, for Spinoza, then, is Nature, the totality of all being; and as such He is impersonal—that is, without personal consciousness, personal intellect, will, or purpose. And in strict logic Spinoza is driven to this last conclusion from the premises laid down: for a cosmic, world-ruling Purpose presupposes what Spinoza denies—a Divinity *above* the cosmos, guiding it and directing it to an End; and there can be no purposive control *over* the cosmos if the cosmos is All. Again, Purpose implies incompleteness, “unfinishedness”, but if the universe is God and God is the universe, the totality of things cannot be incomplete or unfinished, and no Purpose, in the sense of an aim to be realized, is possible. Thus, since God and Nature are one, indivisible and complete, there can be no lack or defect in the universe as a whole. If we think we see much that is lacking or defective, it is because, says Spinoza, we see only in part, we do not see the perfect whole. All these conclusions he unflinchingly accepts.

It is time, therefore, that we should see precisely what he aims to do. Bacon had begun by arguing for an inductive interpretation of reality as limited to Nature itself, and Descartes had taken the same course. Pushing the inquiry much further than Bacon had left it, he had shown that human reason really could get to work upon the facts of the natural world and wrest from them both knowledge and power. But both Bacon and Descartes had carefully hedged up this inquiry within secular limits, leaving revealed religion unchallenged in things spiritual. Across this guarded frontier it was left to Spinoza to take the final step, and he did so. Why should not human reason be adequate for the whole of life—for religion and ethics as well as for the interpretation of the physical world? Accordingly he

set himself, not without confidence, to work out a rational interpretation of reality as a whole, including a scheme of life and morals, which should rest as far as possible upon logical, mathematical certainty. It was not the project of an arrogant and demented ambition; Spinoza's was not the spirit of an inflated egoist; but in the dawn of the modern age it did seem as if no bounds could be set to the achievements of human reason.

## 4

Spinoza aimed at demonstrations that should be every whit as logical as Euclid's. His philosophy was in fact geometrical both in method and style, proceeding from definitions and axioms to logical conclusions—and this despite the fact that the modern movement had begun by somewhat contemptuously throwing over the rigid syllogistic *organum* of the Schoolmen. But in reality Spinoza was never wholly consistent: he “kept two sets of books”; he was both logician and mystic. If, for example, we take the strictly logical statement of his doctrine of God we see how Spinoza was committed to what amounts to a negation. As Windelband has said, the God of Spinozism is everything, and therefore nothing. All the same, Spinoza remained a “God-intoxicated man”. He says explicitly, it is true, that intellect cannot be predicated of God (Nature), but he speaks nevertheless of God's “infinite power of thinking”. He endorses Aristotle's dictum about the Divine self-knowledge (“God knows only Himself”), and as God Himself is All it follows that He knows all. So also God, being impersonal, cannot love (“He who loves God”, Spinoza declares “cannot strive that God should love him in return. If a man were to strive after this he would desire that God should not be God”); all the same, just as he sees man's knowledge to be possible only because of the Divine self-knowledge, so he sees human love to be possible only because of the Divine Love. But the *freedom* of God is definitively denied. “Nature does nothing for the sake of an end, for that eternal and infinite Being whom we call God or Nature *acts by the same necessity by which He exists*. . . . Since therefore He exists for no end, He acts for no end”.

And if God has no freedom, neither has Man: for, the universe being under necessity, Man, as part of the universe, is under necessity likewise, and his free-will is an illusion. "The mind . . . must be determined to this or that volition by a cause which is also determined by another cause, and this again by another, and so on, *ad infinitum*." If men imagine themselves to have free-will, it is only because "they are conscious of their own actions and ignorant of the causes by which these actions are determined" (as in the case, we may suppose, of post-hypnotic suggestion). It is a postulate, we may feel, that almost calls up Descartes's nightmare; for a universal consciousness of free-will which exists only as an illusion is not far inferior in frightfulness to Descartes's "demon-implanted" reason which operated as an organ of deception. Apologists for Spinozism point out, it is true, that the reference here, however, is not to the determination of *ends*, but to the determination of *causes*. In other words, Spinoza is not saying that everything, or anything, is determined (fated) as an *end*. And certainly this is so: for an end implies purpose, which, as we have seen, Spinozism rules out of the cosmic scheme. Man therefore, it is argued, is left "free" to follow any personal "end" consonant with his nature. But the defence collapses when we reflect that what is consonant with a man's nature is determined by his nature. There was really no escape from the iron cage.

Thus far, then, the attempt to provide a purely rationalistic interpretation of reality, made as it was by a thinker of undoubted genius and nobility of spirit, was courageous without being encouraging. An impersonal Nature-god in bonds to its own necessity, a "perfect" universe without purpose and incapable of progress, a human race whose freedom was an illusion—these were results that contrasted oddly with the splendid dreams of progress and the advancing Kingdom of Man with which the movement had begun; and certainly minds schooled in the Christian tradition may have been pardoned if they were not moved straightway to cast aside the old doctrine for the new. Particularly, from the Christian point of view, there was the difficulty inherent in all pantheizing identifications of God with the universe, namely, the failure to give a reasonable account of moral evil. For the Christian knows sin to

be a tragic reality in human nature, an estrangement from God, whereas pantheism is bound to deny any such tragedy or separation and to affirm that God, Man and Nature are one.

But the great question that remained to be answered was, What is the Good Life? And here all the moral earnestness and loftiness of mind of Spinoza were challenged. The Good Life, he declares, is the truly rational life, and things are "good" only in so far as they assist man to enjoy that life of the mind which is determined by his intelligence. As for the final aim of that life of the mind, it is that a man should attain to an adequate conception of himself and of all things in their true relation; and this means the knowledge of God, blessedness being nothing but the peace of mind which springs from this knowledge. But this life and this blessedness are not to be enjoyed in isolation; for man, by the constitution of his nature, is just as truly a social as a rational being, and indeed his social life is the outworking of his rational life. Thus the man who is truly guided by reason will desire nothing for himself which he does not desire for others, nor will he seek any good which he cannot share.

In short, the rational man values fellowship and desires to live in concord. But in seeking this he will seek to live according to what is just, faithful and honourable, for these things are the bonds of concord. Moreover, as hatred is destructive of all fellowship, and therefore of social good, the man who lives rationally will regard hatred as evil. But as hatred feeds upon hatred, and cannot be conquered by force of arms, but can be overcome and extinguished only by love, therefore the rational man will not seek to avenge evil but to return good for evil and repay ill-will with good-will. Thus, to sum up, "it is profitable to men to form communities and to unite themselves to one another by bonds which may make all of them as one; and absolutely it is profitable for them to do whatever may tend to strengthen their friendships".

We may feel, then, that what we have here is something remarkable, not for its novelty but for its familiarity. In Spinoza, as we have sufficiently noted, we have the first great thinker of the modern age who stands outside all the traditional

orthodoxies. Neither Protestant nor Catholic, Christian nor Jew, he held himself free, while drawing upon the wisdom of the ages, to reject every external authority in the sphere of reason, conscience and faith. His sole authority is reason itself, and, with all the garnered lore of mankind to draw upon, he sets himself to construct a rational way of life and conduct. And with what result? With the result that (save for certain notable omissions) his ethics are a paraphrase of the Sermon on the Mount. It is G. K. Chesterton's parable over again. A Brighton youth in search of adventure charts a sailing ship and sails from Brighton pier in quest of some land of his heart's desire. He sights many coasts, touches at many ports, meets many adventures, and, after many moons, descries what seems to be the country of his dreams. Armed to the teeth, he leaps ashore, and finds himself—on Brighton beach. It is right, however, to note the *differentiæ*: Spinoza rejects from his ethics Humility, Pity, and Repentance.

But it is in the region of ethical *dynamism*, of heart-power, that the main *differentia* exists. Whatever the errors and blemishes of seventeenth-century Christian theology, Protestant or Catholic, the Christian Faith had always, as the driving-force of its ethics, the heart-power of certain fundamental, dynamic conceptions. When, for example, we think of the Spinozist conception of God as impersonal, without purpose or will or distinguishing love, and merged into anonymous totality; and when we think of the Spinozist conception of Man as without freedom of will and therefore with only the *simulacrum* of personal, moral life; and even when we think of the conception of the universe itself as a purposeless total perfection, which must seem to mock a world gashed deep with graves and torn by the tragedies of pain and moral evil—when we think of these conceptions and contrast them with the Christian doctrines of God, Man and the World, we can see at least the pragmatic weakness of Spinoza's interpretation of reality. However lofty its moral code, Spinozism could lift only a pathetically futile, pedagogical finger against the rebellious realities of man's inward and outward world. Strive for the good life, but know that your freedom of will is an illusion. Strive against evil, but know that, in their totality, all things are good. Seek the betterment of the



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world, but know that, in a universe already divinely perfect, progress is impossible. Love God, but do not expect Him to love you in return—these were indeed counsels of perfection, and of a “perfection” that was, itself, singularly unconvincing and unalluring.

## 5

### KANT

#### 1

DESCARTES died in 1650, Spinoza in 1677; Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg, East Prussia, in 1724. Any attempt to summarize the Kantian system in a single chapter would deserve derision; but perhaps if we turn to Plato's *Phædo* we shall find our best introduction to it. For in a celebrated passage in the *Phædo* Socrates protests to Cebes and Simmias that the man who has the spirit of true philosophy lives in two worlds—as to his body in the world of the senses, but as to his mind in the world of reality. “What shall we say”, he asks, “of the actual acquirement of knowledge? Have sight and hearing any truth in them? Are they not, as the poets are always telling us, inaccurate witnesses? And yet, if even they are inaccurate and indistinct, what is to be said of the other senses?” He concludes that thought is best when the mind is “gathered into herself”, and in this sense, he declares, the true philosopher dies daily. “It has been proved to us by experience that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body—the soul in herself must behold things in themselves.”

Then may we not say, Simmias, that if, as we are always repeating, there is an absolute beauty, and goodness, and an absolute essence of all things; and if to this . . . we refer all our sensations, and with this compare them, finding these ideas to be pre-existent and our inborn possession—then our souls must have had a prior existence . . . ?

With this specific conclusion Kant's thought, of course, made no contact; nevertheless the object of his critical analytical argument, like that of Socrates, was to rescue philosophy from the dead level of a flat sensationalist scepticism, and to bring men back to a rational belief in transcendent reality.

Kant, then, was the son of a Königsberg saddler of Scotch descent, Immanuel's grandfather having emigrated from north of the Tweed. Kant himself passed, at the age of sixteen, from the town *gymnasium* into the University, and completed his course in 1746. He spent years as an unsalaried university-lecturer (*privat dozent*), and remained at his desk when, from 1758 to 1763, East Prussia was occupied, not for the last time, by Russian troops. It was not until 1770, when he was forty-six, that he attained to the dignity of a Professor's chair, and not until 1781, when he was fifty-seven, that his epoch-making *Critique of Pure Reason* (followed later by his critiques of the *Practical Reason* and of the *Judgment*) established his enduring fame.

And certainly there was little in his circumstances or his outward person to recommend him. He was not an aristocrat like Bacon, or a man of private means like Descartes; he had little opportunity to travel and make the acquaintance of foreign *savants*, he lived and died in his native city. Physically he was unimpressive—only a little over five feet in height, hollow-chested, and slightly deformed in one shoulder. He never married, and he lived a life of extreme simplicity, rising, summer and winter, at five, beginning his lecturing at seven, and limiting himself to one formal meal a day. At that repast two or three friends shared his table, and—not because the courses were lavish, but because the discourse was rich—the dinner usually lasted for three hours. Then the Professor, always neatly and smartly dressed, went out for his daily walk, returned punctually to his books and papers, and retired to bed at a quarter to ten. Heine has a pleasant picture of all this.

He led a mechanical, regular, almost abstract bachelor-existence in a little retired street of Königsberg. . . . I do not believe that the great clock of the cathedral performed in a more passionless and methodical manner its daily routine than did its townsman, Immanuel Kant. Rising in the morning, coffee-drinking, writing, reading lectures, dining, walking, everything had its appointed time, and the neighbours knew that it was exactly half-past three o'clock when Immanuel Kant stepped forth from his house, in his grey, tight-fitting coat, with his Spanish cane in his hand, and betook himself to the little linden

avenue called after him to this day the "Philosopher's Walk". Summer and winter he walked up and down it eight times, and when the weather was dull, or heavy clouds prognosticated rain, the townspeople beheld his servant, the old Lampe, trudging anxiously behind him with a big umbrella under his arm.

But if Kant was Prussian in his precisionism, and in his zest for marshalling and systematizing his ideas, he was Scotch in his dry humour, perhaps also in his moral seriousness; and in his class-room lectures he sometimes took on the guise of a preacher. For this there was a further reason. Toward the end of the seventeenth century the hard grim sterile dogmatism of German Protestantism had provoked a movement of protest—the evangelical-mystical movement known as Pietism. It was warm, emotional, devout; its leader, Spener, influenced Count Zinzendorf, who, in turn, influenced John Wesley, and Königsberg became one of its centres. Kant's upbringing had been in this pietistic atmosphere, and—as with Schleiermacher, later—the influence of the movement remained with him long after he had moved away from its doctrines. It showed itself in his earnest desire to reach and teach the people, perhaps in his rejection of the academic, professorial style and his preference for lecturing without manuscript, and more clearly in his way of devoting the last ten minutes of the lecture to moral and religious "applications". And his influence grew. If he never won the popular fame which Hegel was to achieve later, his renown was real and Europe-wide, and in his own city he was an honoured prophet. He died in 1804. Perhaps it is true that he believed, toward the end, that he had built up a system of thought in which the mind of man could find an enduring abiding-place.

If we turn, then, to the Kantian system itself, it is not too much to claim for it—it was a claim that Kant himself endorsed—that what the Copernican system achieved for Astronomy, the Kantian system achieved for Philosophy: and both achievements were revolutionary. Before Copernicus, men had thought that the sun moved round the earth; Copernicus proved that the earth moves round the sun. Before Kant, men had generally assumed that their perceptions of the external world conformed to the nature of things; Kant

set himself to show that the external world as we know it conforms to the nature of our perceptions. Not that this was a wholly new conception. The ancient Greeks, as we have seen, had thought their way into a distinction between *appearance* and *reality*, and in modern times Berkeley (b.1684), in his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, had postulated that the reality of objective things is not the things themselves but an *ideal* reality, communicated by the mind of God to the mind of man; but the extremes of the Berkeleyan theory constituted for Kant, in fact, an intellectual scandal.

More particularly he stood between two opposite schools of thought which had developed since Bacon and Descartes—the rationalistic and the empirical (or sceptical) schools. The rationalism of Descartes had found its criterion of certain knowledge in the clearness and distinctness of ideas, supplemented by the mathematical method. The empiricism of Bacon had maintained, on the contrary, that all knowledge arises from perception and experience. By the time of Kant, the Rationalistic school had returned (as we noted in Spinoza) to the purely deductive, Euclidean, method of syllogistic analysis—that is, to the elucidation of dogmatic metaphysical ideas from given axioms and definitions. On the other hand the Empirical school, regarding all thought as simply sublimated sensation and perception, had arrived (through Hume) at complete scepticism or “probabilism”, and the denial of God, Substance, the Soul, Causation and all purely metaphysical concepts. This was the controversy which Kant inherited: and inextricably involved in it was the question of the two worlds, of Appearance and Reality—of things-as-they-seem and things-in-themselves.

For Kant this distinction assumed a positive and constructive significance. Man's knowledge relates to *phenomena*, to things as they seem. Whatever we can possibly know about the world takes the form of a picture presented to our conscious mind, and is conditioned and organized by that mind. In other words, our knowledge is formed by the nature of our perceptions. The matter of knowledge comes from without: the *form* comes from within our own minds. Things-in-themselves (*noumena*) certainly affect our sensibility; they

excite those outward effects (*phenomena*) which assume the forms of perceptions in our minds; but it is to these assumed forms that our knowledge is confined. We perceive things, experience things, know things, in this "phenomenal" way, relating all our impressions of the outside world to our own consciousness. Also, in this process, something else is implied, and that something is *intelligence*. (We find Plato's Socrates saying much the same in the *Theætetus*. It is intelligence, he says, and not our passive sensations, which gives us our knowledge of real objects, and which holds together, and works upon, the data which the sensations supply.) According to Kant, intelligence has a rule of its own which operates behind all our knowledge and is the very ground of that knowledge. What, then, is this rule?

For answer let us first turn back to Descartes. We remember that he spoke of mathematical certainty—for example, our certain knowledge (granted the validity of reason) that  $2+3$  make 5, or that a square has four sides, or that any moving object will necessarily pass from one point in space to another—will reach one point *after* it has passed the other. These are self-evident judgments. But they are what Kant would call "synthetic" judgments. For, when we examine them, we see that they involve certain presuppositions not explicit in the predication; for one thing, that there is something which we know as *Quantity* (the numbers 2 and 3 presuppose it), but above all, that there is something called *Space* and something called *Time* (what modern Relativity has to say about these does not concern us here).

Space and Time are forms of perception which have entered unbidden, so to say, into these apparently simple, self-evident judgments which we have instanced, and really they have made these judgments possible; also they have made them "synthetic"—they have contributed something to them, so that they are not really *simple* statements but contain certain related ideas—in fact, what has been thus contributed is in each case the very ground of the statement. And more: it is the very ground of *any* statement we can possibly make about perceived objects: it is the frame into which our perceptions have to be fitted if they are to be perceptions at all.

Whatever we see is in Space; whatever we experience is in Time. The ideas of Space and Time are, in short, "conditions of the possibility of phenomena"; they are conditions which are *imposed* by our intelligence, for our minds are so constituted that we are bound to impose them. The very fact that we *perceive* anything means that we intuitively *conceive* it in terms of Space and Time: and it is in this way that we build up our knowledge of the phenomenal world—the world as it appears to us.

The point is, therefore, that our minds, according to Kant, are governed by certain rules or thought-forms. We did not draw up these rules; they belong to our mental make-up; they are inborn. Into Kant's elaborate analysis of these we have no need to enter, but we may note that it is in this connection that we meet with the famous Kantian Categories. The term "category" itself is Aristotelean. Aristotle made a classification of ten distinct forms in which an *assertion* may be made about any subject. and these ten forms of assertion, or predication, he called categories. Kant uses the term to denote the twelve fundamental *conceptions*, or forms, in which (according to his system) our mind envisages matter. Before the Categories we have the innate ideas of Space and Time; from these the four fundamental principles of Quantity, Quality, Modality and Relation, and, grouped around these four, the twelve Categories of Unity, Plurality, Totality, Reality, etc.<sup>1</sup> In brief, he contends, both in his general philosophy and in his ethics, for certain standards and values which reason did not create, which cannot be dispensed with, and which do not admit of further analysis. In this way, Kant's philosophy is supremely a *critical* philosophy. He criticizes experience in order to show that it contains *a priori* elements—elements which experience itself could not supply.

What, then, of the two worlds of Appearance and Reality? The world of appearance—the phenomenal world—is in a sense a real world also. It is real for us, and it answers to the practical test of experience—it can be empirically validated.

<sup>1</sup> Unity, Plurality, Totality, Reality, Negation, Limitation; Inherence and Subsistence, Causality and Dependence, Community; and finally, Possibility and Impossibility, Existence and Non-existence and Necessity.

All the same, it is an order of reality that is relative, not absolute. On the other hand, absolute reality belongs to the *noumenal* world—the world of things-in-themselves. And though we cannot break into that world, reason is forever trying to do so—forever striving to equate knowledge with reality, and thus to attain, through knowledge of the truth, to intellectual beatitude. This is what Kierkegaard came to know as “the love-story of the intellect”—a hopeless love, so far as mortal man is concerned, and yet somehow not altogether a vain one. For though we cannot obtain, in this life, to completeness of knowledge, yet we ought not to deny it as if that completeness—that perfect correspondence between thought and reality—were inconceivable. It is, so to say, the impossible possibility, the possible impossibility. And the idea of total reality existing as a known unity points, in fact, to the idea of God. Moreover though this idea of total reality, so far as speculative reason is concerned, is only an “ideal”, it is, Kant claimed, an ideal which completes and crowns our human knowledge. But with Kant there was no tendency to interpret it, as Spinoza had done, pantheistically.

And so we come to what most concerns us here—Kant’s teaching about Man and the conduct of life.

## 2

As in his general philosophy Kant takes his stand on the rational consciousness and shows how thought is governed by certain *a priori* principles, so in ethics he takes his stand on the moral consciousness and shows how here also there are *a priori* principles. We must try to see how he develops this teaching, and we shall begin with the leading question which Kant himself raises: Why do we call a good man good?

We do not (he says) call a man good because he has great intellectual gifts, or because he is high-born, or handsome, or well educated, or wealthy; nor do we call him good because he has great will-power and stoical fortitude or self-command. He may have all these inward and outward characteristics and yet be a bad man, for he may employ them for evil ends. Again, we do not rightly call a man good because his name is



associated with good works—for example, because he gives largely to charity or is prominent as a social reformer: for he may serve these causes from an unworthy motive and may all the time be seeking to advance his own reputation. It is by a man's *will*, by his inmost motive, that he must be adjudged good or bad. "*There is nothing absolutely good but a good will.*"

But what is a "good will"? The desire to be happy is natural and may adopt many subsidiary ends. In order to be happy I must preserve my life; in order to be happy I must, presumably, be in a position to indulge my wishes. Perhaps I think I shall be happy if I am rich, or if I am famous; and so on. These are more or less natural desires, but manifestly they have no moral worth. The will to be happy is not the good will and does not make a man a good man. Take a very different case. Take the case of a man of sensibility. He is sympathetic; he cannot bear to see others suffer, for it destroys his own happiness: therefore he has a reasonable disposition to promote happiness in others as a means of preserving his own. Is this the good will? Certainly it may confer much benefit upon others, but, says Kant, it is not really good. It is pathological rather than moral. What, then, is the good will? *It is the will that wills the good for goodness' sake*—that is, from a sense of moral obligation to the Good, or, in other words, from a sense of Duty. When an action has Duty for its motive, really for its motive, then that action is good, for the will behind it is good; and it is good even if its outward result may fall short of an outward good.

But what is Duty? We know that the words "duty" and "due" are akin. Customs "duty" is something that is "due" under the Revenue laws; moral duty is what is due under the Moral Law: it is, as Kant puts it, "the necessity of an act as motived solely by reverence" for that Law. Of the Moral Law itself we shall speak in a moment: but what does Kant here mean by "reverence"? He states its implication thus: "Only that which does not *serve* my inclination, but *outweighs* it, or at least excludes it from all influence upon my decision, can be an object of reverence, and therefore an imperative." Reverence, therefore, means here a moral disposition that is superior to inclination and to all motives

other than that of devotion to the imperative requirements, of the Law—the bare Law itself.

The good will, then, is the will that does good out of pure reverence for the Moral Law, and not from any ulterior motive. Kant is, of course, very far from denying the activity of other desires. We may have many such inclinations, appetites, desires; indeed we are sure to have them, and to be without them would be unnatural. But in so far as we are good we will not elevate any such appetite or desire into a maxim of conduct, or rule of action; on the contrary, the *maxim* (the subjective principle which we recognize as the ground of our self-determination) will be derived objectively—and directly—from the Moral Law, and subjectively from our reverence for that Law. This, then, is what good will means, and the good man is, in this very definitive sense, the “man of good will”.

No doubt, in defining goodness in these terms, Kant laid himself open to the charge of extreme rigorism or purism, and we have the well-known retort of Schiller:

The friends whom I love I gladly would serve, but to this  
inclination incites me;  
And so I am forced from virtue to swerve, since my act, through  
affection, delights me.

But Kant is by no means affirming that an act is good only when it is done against our inclination or in conflict with our natural desires and affections: he is affirming that an act is good only when, in the performance of that act, reverence for the demands of the Moral Law is sovereign over all other considerations, so that the act would still be performed even if the other inclinations were absent or were opposed to it. It is another way of saying that the good will is the will that recognizes as decisive the unconditional authority of the Moral Law at all times and in all circumstances. Here is the *categorical imperative*.

The Categorical Imperative! The expression has become famous, and we can now see what Kant means by it. He means the positive, absolute assertion of the Moral Law's *Thou shalt, Thou oughtest*, which is registered in the reason and

moral consciousness of man. It is not a question of argument. It is not something that waits upon, say, a metaphysical proof of the existence of God. It is something as immediate and distinct as Descartes's "I think, therefore I am": so that Kant was not more sure of the starry heavens above him than of the Moral Law within him.

But what is this Moral Law? Clearly it is not the Ten Commandments—it is not derived from revealed religion. (St Paul, incidentally, is often misquoted as affirming in Romans 2: 15 that the Law, in that sense, is written in the heart of man: what he says is that the *effect* of the Law is written there.) Nor does Kant mean anything in the nature of distinct categories of duties (*a*) toward God, (*b*) toward man, (*c*) toward the lower creation. Nor, again, does he mean any table of enumerated obligations whatsoever; for these must be as complex and multitudinous as the kaleidoscopic combinations of circumstances and relationships of our individual lives. He means one single fundamental principle, namely, that *I am under obligation to act in such a way that the maxim of my will can at the same time hold good as a principle of universal law.*

This is the Categorical Imperative. I am so to act and live that, if the principle of my action and way of life were universally adopted, it would make for the good of mankind. If I am in doubt about the ethics of any act, I must ask myself, What would be the consequence for humanity if everyone were to act upon the principle which is to govern my action now? And according to Kant this Imperative is not derived from experience, nor does it depend upon experience for its validity; it springs directly from reason; and even if all men disobeyed it, they could not annul it. Their disobedience would be their disobedience and the Law would remain inviolable. They would not have "broken" it; they would have broken themselves—as in fact we do.

And here we must note one inescapable and all-important presupposition. In the natural phenomenal world in which we live, we are ruled (it appears) by necessary mechanistic laws of cause and effect. Whatever happens in Nature is, apparently, the effect of a cause, which itself is the effect of an antecedent cause, which again is the effect of yet another cause, and so on,

down the interminable chain of causation. And, if we accept this theory as true, we are obliged to recognize that this chain is binding and that Nature knows no freedom. The phenomenal world is ruled by Necessity; it is, as Descartes argued, a matter of mechanism. But the Moral Law, the Categorical Imperative, proclaims to man that, in the higher reaches of his being, he is free: for a law which says, "Thou shalt" would be meaningless otherwise. "I think" means, says Descartes, "I am", "I ought" means, just as certainly, "I am free to choose". The Moral Law certifies man's freedom, and ranks him, as to his moral life, above the phenomenal, mechanistic order of Nature. He is a person, not a machine, and his will belongs to the noumenal, not the phenomenal, world: it is a thing-in-itself.

And so we pass to the Kantian doctrine of *ends*. Every rational action has some end in view, and man is so constituted that he is consciously free to choose what that end shall be. Appetites, desires, wishes, are natural and spring up unbidden; but an "end" is a matter of rational choice. Of course, one may choose as an end the gratification of some appetite or inclination; but one is not "bound" to choose it; on the contrary, one is morally bound *not* to choose it—not to choose it as an *end*. Our appetites and inclinations have their own natural place and function, but we do violence to the constitution of our being when we elevate them to the region of ends. We are bound, says Kant, to choose ends that are deducible from the Moral Law, and to compel ourselves to thwart our inclinations when they oppose that choice. For moral action—virtue—carries with it this implication of *self-compulsion*. Emphatically and precisely *that*, and not the compulsion of others. The compulsion of others is, in some measure, a civil necessity: all State law rests upon it; but morality, as such, goes out where compulsion comes in. The voluntary principle is fundamental for moral action; on the other hand, *self-compulsion* belongs to the moral autonomy of every rational individual.

What, then, are the ends which Duty dictates? First, *our own individual perfection*. And what is perfection? Not simply faultlessness. In grammar a verb is "perfect" when it denotes

an act as complete, and the word itself means, etymologically, "thoroughly done". so we are to seek perfection in the sense of our own human *completeness* as rational, moral beings. We are required, says Kant, to seek to "rise above the rudeness of nature, and, at the expense of the animal in us, to develop the humanity", so that all our powers and faculties move forward under the discipline of the good will. Secondly, Duty requires us to seek *the happiness of others*. Our own happiness cannot be a moral end, for that would mean the raising of a blind impulse of nature to the rank of a maxim. Again, the perfection of others, according to Kant, cannot be a moral end, for their perfection is not in our keeping (and most of us know that moral busybodies defeat their own ends) Of course we should *desire* the perfection of others, but morality, as we have seen, is pivoted upon the individual will, and no man can usurp the prerogative of another man's will for the other's good. What we can seek, and ought to seek, is the happiness, the well-being, of others.

There is no goodness, then, apart from the good will; that will is good which is motivated supremely by reverence for the Moral Law; and the categorical imperative of the Moral Law is that which demands of us that we should so act that it would be good for humanity if the rule and principle of our action were followed universally. But what does Kant mean when he says that man is free to obey the rule of this rigorous exacting moral code which he lays down? He roundly asserts it. *Du kannst, dann du sollst*: "Thou canst, because thou shouldst". Emerson has expressed this in lines that are often misquoted and the *misquotation* runs:

So near to grandeur is our dust,  
So nigh to God is man,  
That when the Law declares, "Thou must",  
The soul replies, "I can".

Emerson in fact did not write, "The *soul* replies, 'I can'"; instead of "soul" he wrote "youth". And the difference is significant. Perhaps it is only youth that is capable of the moral self-confidence of that ringing response. At least, are we not obliged, if we would keep within the bounds of moral realism,

to make a distinction here between freedom and ability? We may be free to *choose* to obey, but how far are we really *able* to obey?

The fact is that Kant himself recognized the limitations of his "*Du kannst*". Man's "I can" to the Categorical Imperative is valid, as he puts it, only in the *noumenal* reference. The meaning of this is plain if we remember Kant's claim that the human will is itself noumenal. Thus, by reason of our will, each of us lives a noumenal life, just as by reason of our bodily senses each of us is bound to the world of phenomena. But in the phenomenal world we cannot achieve the perfect good; and it is obvious that this is so, if only from the fact that perfection means not only virtue but also happiness, and virtue and happiness in perfect union; and in the Natural order in which our life is cast, this perfect union, as Plato recognized, and as we all very well know, is not attainable. Therefore our "I can" to the Moral Law can be completely valid only as a *noumenal* possibility.

Such, at all events, is the language of Kantian philosophy. If we desire a statement of it in plainer English we may turn to the Authorized Version of St. Paul's Epistles. For St. Paul recognizes, like Kant, that we are related to two worlds, the phenomenal and the noumenal, and that, in this present life, our knowledge is not noumenal but phenomenal—not an immediate and complete perception of reality (not "face-to-face") but a broken perception of *appearances*. We know, he says, bit by bit ("in part"), and what we see are the baffling reflections in a mirror ("through a glass, darkly").<sup>1</sup> And he carries this contrast, as Kant does, into the sphere of ethics. First, he makes, like Kant, a distinction between ethical volition and ethical performance, between the moral freedom of the will and moral ability. "To will [the good]", he says, "is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not." And then he relates this distinction to the "double" life of the man of good will—his life under the natural, phenomenal order, and his *noumenal* life: "With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin"<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, to repeat, the "I can" of the moral will has the promise of perfection only as a *noumenal* possibility; but

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 13: 12.

<sup>2</sup> See Rom. 7: 14-25.

noumenally it *is* possible, and this possibility is underwritten by the Moral Law itself. The command implies a promise. Therefore we conclude, says Kant, that the command, which reason recognizes as unconditional and absolutely authoritative, and which points to a limitless, perfect good, implies also the possibility of limitless progress toward it, and this again implies the perpetuation of the existence of the moral personality. Therefore Immortality as well as Freedom is an implicit postulate of the moral life.

And now, before turning, finally, to Kant's religious teaching, we shall note briefly the social and the æsthetic applications of his philosophy.

## 3

The Categorical Imperative encounters individual man in his own consciousness, and he must make for himself the existential, moral decision which no other person can make for him. But the Moral Law is also universal. It is binding upon the individual man, as such, but it is binding therefore upon all, for all men are individuals. So that there is at least this one great bond between the individual and mankind, that all alike, and whether they recognize it or not, are under this one supreme Law. Again, the individual moral man's consciousness of the Moral Law is part of his consciousness of himself as a *person*, a moral personality, and therefore an *end*, and not merely a means. But further, it teaches him that his fellow-men, being likewise under the same Law, are also persons, and therefore ends to be revered, not means to be exploited. For it is universal Duty, stamping upon every man the sign of moral responsibility, that signifies man's human dignity and lifts him above the lower creatures.

On the foundation of these conceptions, according to Kant, we may build up a society, a civilization, which is a true "kingdom of ends", and which he describes as "the systematic combination of a number of diverse rational beings under common laws". And, though we may think it strange to have the principles of democracy enunciated by a Prussian Professor in the days of Frederick William II, it is true that the Kantian doctrine is essentially democratic. It envisages, in

fact, a republic in which the autonomy of each citizen is harmonious with that of all, because, firstly, all alike are under the same fundamental obligations of Duty, and secondly, the laws are the expression of the general will. In such a society (as Rousseau also argued) each citizen is at once subject and sovereign; he is subject to the common laws, but those laws are also *his* laws, since he, equally with all other citizens, was concerned in their enactment or perpetuation.

But Kant went further. In his treatise "On the Possibility and the Means of Attaining a Lasting Peace" he advocated, as a project for future statesmanship, a federation of democratic States which should serve as the nucleus of a World Commonwealth. That the Federation should be democratic, resting upon the will of the contracting peoples, was, he judged, essential, for it was the people who suffered most from war, and peace would be the more secure by being taken out of the keeping of despotic rulers. He proceeded to point out that too much was not to be expected of such a project even when such a Federation was achieved. For such a union of States would not put an end to the state of nature, and the state of nature was always one of potential war. But when *all* States were willing to subordinate their independent sovereignty to a World Republic, then the state of nature, as between nation and nation, would pass into the state of Law, and peace could be reasonably established. Until then, he concludes, "in place of the positive idea of a World Republic, we must be satisfied with the negative substitute of a continually advancing League of States to prevent war".

And finally a word about Kant's doctrine of *Æsthetics*, which contributes to the unity of his system. The teaching of the English empirical school was that *æsthetics* rested upon sensation, upon feeling. We regard a thing as beautiful because we find it in a high sense agreeable—because it gives us a feeling of pleasure. The German rationalists related *æsthetics*, on the contrary, to knowledge. We appreciate beauty intellectually. Here again Kant stood between the opposing schools. The appreciation of the beautiful, he says, is an act of reflective *æsthetic judgment*, and involves a mental act of contemplation; but because the appreciation of the



beautiful is essentially satisfying and delightful, it is also inseparable from feeling. The agreeable excites gratification, the good excites approbation, the useful excites prudential appreciation, the beautiful excites disinterested favour. The appreciation of the agreeable and the useful, however, is empirical and depends upon personal taste, inclination or circumstances; it is therefore not universally the same. The appreciation of the good and of the beautiful are *a priori* judgments, their ground is in the constitution of our minds, and it has the quality of *universality*. In the sphere of the intellect, reason is active; in the sphere of ethics the will is active; but in the sphere of æsthetics we can *feel* what we can neither know nor will.

In this way our sense of the beautiful carries us farther toward the world of reality than reason can take us. We do not pronounce a thing beautiful because we want to possess it, nor because it stands in certain relations to other objects, nor because it subserves some other purpose, but because it *is what it is*. Finally, when beauty passes beyond definitive form and excites the sense of the unbounded, the incomparable, the unconditioned, it has the highest æsthetic effect—the Sublime; and Sublimity, by *suggesting* the Infinite, unites imagination and understanding in an experience that touches the borderline of the æsthetic *and* the moral. The Good and the Beautiful, the Moral Law and the Sublime, are related; they are not contained in the objects of Nature, their dwelling is in the mind of man.

So we bring to an end this rough and broken outline of Kant's general philosophical outlook. And as we picture this little giant bending over his low desk in the crowded classroom, talking extemporaneously in a thin voice that is heard in an almost painful stillness, and pouring out his tremendous conceptions which seem to comprehend almost the whole of life—logic, metaphysics, æsthetics, ethics, jurisprudence, everything—and which he organized into a unity around his majestic postulates of transcendent reality and the moral law—as we so picture him, we may understand how the German youths who flocked to hear him came to regard him as an almost messianic personage: and we may reflect that their descendants were to

yield more excessive homage to abysmally inferior messiahs in days to come. Also we may feel that whatever may be thought to-day of Kant's philosophy, the garnered wisdom of the last century and a half has found nothing to correct in his international outlook, little to add to it, and much to learn from it.

## 4

We have seen enough of Kant's thought to understand that, profoundly religious as he was, his religion was pre-eminently the religion of reason; the piety that he preached was what Wordsworth calls *natural* piety, the piety of Natural Religion. But what precisely is meant by Natural Religion? Briefly, it is that form of religion which professes to owe nothing to Revelation and everything to Nature; but we may distinguish three types. First, there is the type which, accepting as valid the current knowledge of Nature, seeks to ascend "through Nature to God". Second, there is the type which looks less to external Nature than to man's own rational and moral consciousness and seeks to construct a faith derived from that consciousness. The third type is distinctively philosophical and seeks to investigate, not only the natural world and human nature, but also the nature of knowledge and of reality, and to give them a rational-religious interpretation. Kant's thought belonged to the third type, but in its main emphasis it conformed to the second. As we have seen, it rested upon the moral man's consciousness of Absolute Duty, and as such it was a religion of morality—not so much a religion that produced a morality as a morality that produced a religion. For us the instructive and significant fact is that, on the basis of this rationalist view of man and the world, Kant builds up, not only the doctrines of God, Freedom and Immortality, but also the doctrines of the Fall, of Sin, of Repentance and Conversion. No doubt, as a Professor who held his position under the Prussian State, he had every reason to fit his public teaching within the general framework of Lutheran orthodoxy, but this in fact he did not do, and his nonconformity earned him the remonstrances of his King and Government.

First, then, we shall note Kant's break with Christian orthodoxy. To begin, he breaks, as Spinoza had done, with any and every fundamental association of religious faith with historical events. History, he contends, belongs to the world of *phenomena*, not to the *noumenal* world, and therefore nothing that, being historical, partakes of the nature of relative *appearance* (and not of the real and transcendental) can be of vital importance for religion. Transcendent ideas may be symbolized in historical legend, but the object of faith is the ideas themselves. "Saving faith" is rational belief in the external ideal of humanity; this may be symbolized in the Jesus of Gospel history, but in itself it is not belief in His historical person. Thus, too, there was no historical Atonement. The true atonement is the "crucifixion", the self-crucifixion, of the morally regenerate man. With this go the denial of miracles (as incredible contradictions of the laws of experience, and as relations which have nothing to do with the performance of our duties), and a qualified criticism of the Church. Ideally the Church is, for Kant, a universal ethical society whose members encourage and confirm one another in the Good Life: and he recognizes that, as a matter of history, something of this ideal has been conserved for humanity by the Christian communities. But the actual churches, by elevating an historical Faith above the faith of reason, have (he says) "specialized" both religious faith and religious service into something more or less artificial and sectarian, and have brought the people into undesirable dependence upon the clergy. "All that man supposes himself able to do in order to please God, beyond living a good life, is false service"; and it is this "false service" which the churches tend, according to Kant, to require and honour.

This should suffice to show that Kant's rejection of all forms of orthodox Christianity was definitive, his devotion being to the religion of reason. But, this being so, it is the more significant that he should (like Spinoza) have arrived at so many conclusions that are distinctive of the Christian Faith. It should also be recognized that his elaboration of a strictly rationalist faith followed the pattern of the Christian tradition, in the sense that his was a conscious attempt to

re-state Christian beliefs in rationalist terms, or to substitute for a rejected doctrine a Kantian equivalent.

In the first place, his rationalism comes near to orthodoxy in his doctrine of moral evil. He sees that, by reason of a disorder and perversion of the human will, there is a real moral conflict in man, a conflict which cannot be satisfactorily explained merely as a struggle between man's animal nature and his spiritual nature; rather, it is a struggle between the spirit of evil and the spirit of good, the human and the anti-human, and its origin is beyond human history and human knowledge. The terms, the Fall and Original Sin, so long as it is understood that they are terms for the *mystery* of iniquity and are not informed with an historical content, are therefore, for him, rationally valid.

It follows also that a true moral change from the evil mind to the good mind involves Repentance and Conversion, a dying to the old Adam, and a putting on of the new ideal God-pleasing Humanity. And here, like Spinoza, Kant has his own doctrine of Incarnation. Humanity in its wholeness, in its complete perfectness—this is the eternal Son of God: and this Humanity has come—is ever coming—into the world, and is in every one of us. Moreover he sees in the historical picture of Jesus Christ, as bearing shame and death for the good of all, the supreme representation of this eternal God-pleasing Humanity: and it may well be true, he declares, that individual man can himself become truly pleasing to God only through a living, working belief in this eternal Humanity whose supreme symbol is the Jesus of history, but whose dwelling is in God and in the souls of men.

And so, finally, if mankind is to pass from moral anarchy into moral unity, there is need, not only for Faith, but also for a world-wide Church: not only for a "learned" Faith resting on historical evidences dogmatically propounded by a "learned" clergy, but for a Church founded upon the pure faith of reason and morality. Even so, the transition from an historical Faith to the faith of reason cannot be sudden: it must come gradually, and Kant looked to liberal scholarship within the Christian churches to aid its advent.

What, then, is to be said? First, perhaps, that to spend even

a little time with Kant is—at least for many of us—to be made aware of the majestic mountain-heights of thought, which he ranged sure-footed as an alpine guide. Also it is to feel one's spirit searched and braced by the moral earnestness which, like the keen, clean wind of the mountains, blows through his teaching. In this respect, if, with M. Maritain, we divide our world-teachers into two classes, first, those who take only the flat, horizontal view of human relationships, and who recognize no values, no sanctions, other than those provided by the mechanism of human society, and secondly, those whose world-view includes the *vertical* dimension also, and who confess an authority of sovereign right transcendent above man's world—if we make such a division, then there can be no doubt about Kant's category. He belongs emphatically and illustriously to the company of the seers who witness to the sanctions of eternity.

But what are we to think of his criticism of the historical character of the Christian Faith and of his "faith of reason" and "religion of morality"? The question of Faith and History has been touched upon in our study of Spinoza. Few Protestant churchmen can read Kant's strictures without some searchings of mind and conscience, and it must be remembered that St. Paul himself warns us against a misplaced emphasis upon "knowing Christ after the flesh".<sup>1</sup> It would certainly be a grotesque perversion of Christianity to treat the Faith as resting mainly upon historical evidence, and therefore to be approached by means of detective investigation, the following up of clues, and the lawyer-like building up of a "case". But we may feel, nevertheless, that Kant suggests a forced antithesis when he poses the spiritual or transcendental against the historical. It belongs to the genius of Christianity, in any case, to repudiate this antithesis and affirm the vital relation between eternity and time, between the Absolute and history, between the noumenal mystery of Being and the phenomenal time-born process. Gnosticism or Manichæism might treat the historical as irrelevant, but Christianity could not do so without repudiating its past and forfeiting its future. But we may drop the terminology of philosophy and say quite simply that Christians will

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 16.

never give up the historical Jesus. We shall be wise, however, if we do not dismiss too lightly what Kant has to say about the dangers of a "specialized" church-faith and a correspondingly "specialized" church-morality.

It is less easy to understand his advocacy of the "faith of reason" as the foundation of a universal "religion of morality". If it is seriously intended that the "faith of reason" should take the place of all other forms of religious belief, it must be supposed that this "faith" is something definitive and articulate. But what is "Reason", with a capital R, that it should produce a universal "faith"? Spinoza's reason runs to pantheism, Leibnitz's to monadology, Hume's to complete scepticism, Rousseau's to the cult of Deistic naturalism, Comte's to the worship of Humanity, Huxley's to the criticism of the Cosmic Process, Nietzsche's to the cult of the Superman; until presently reason turns upon Reason, deposes it and exalts the Instincts in its place. And in the sphere of ethics and political morality the babel voices can be equally conflictive. Pacifism, militarism, liberty, slavery, monogamy, free love, all have had their advocates in the name of Reason. We may feel that there can be no "Faith of Reason" because there is no "Reason", other than the multitudinous and contrarious intelligences of individual men and women.

Moreover, it is strange to find this cult of rationalism keeping company in the mind of Kant with his doctrine of moral evil. He recognizes a radical perversion in human nature, and agrees that it is an insoluble mystery that points to a doctrine of the Fall, or something like it. But if so, how are we to suppose that Reason, alone among the higher faculties, retains its rectitude unimpaired, and is competent, in spite of the disorders of the will, the imagination, and the passions, to produce out of itself a faith that is adequate to man's need?

Finally, we note the Kantian conception of God. For any Theistic faith the doctrine of God must be central; it certainly is central to Christianity. What is central for Kant is not God but the Moral Law, the Categorical Imperative. God is no more than the Great Inference. And He is static. He is like the Moral Law itself, which, so to say, He impersonates; His very goodness, one feels, is a static absolute. And this perhaps

is the result of passing the historical Faith of Christianity through the filter of a rationalism which, straining out its historical content, leaves only a religion of pure ideas. For the God of the New Testament is not static but dynamic. He acts, and acts within the phenomena of time. In history the Divine Life is as it were transubstantiated and becomes the sacrament of the Divine Passion.

And this is a conception of God which, when once it has been contemplated, must criticise all static concepts, and remain to haunt the mind with its own self-evidencing power and glory. For if God is "He than whom we can think of nothing higher", then, before this revelation, all static conceptions must pass as the half-gods are said to go at the advent of full-orbed divinity. We have seen beyond them and beheld the Highest. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." To say that by the exercise of human freedom, by a perpetuated act of moral decision, the good will may supplant the bad will in man, and that thus a perfect God-pleasing humanity assumes our nature, is not the same thing.

There is, it must be confessed, a temptation nowadays to push all such criticisms as this to an extreme, and this by means of a pseudo-historicism which traces the sources of our modern evils and catastrophes back to whatever particular doctrinal system specially excites the critic's prejudice. Thus if we specially dislike Martin Luther we proceed to show that Nazism had its direct evolution from Lutheranism. And we may feel that this tendency shows itself even in Professor Hromadka's (and Masaryk's) otherwise trenchant strictures upon Kant.

Kant's absorbing emphasis upon reason, upon the majesty of the Categorical Imperative (of irresistible and personal consciousness of duty), and upon the dignity of autonomous conscience without a real love for the fellowman, was responsible, in Masaryk's judgment, for the development not only of German romantic Titanism, for the heartless, callous, sophisticated Faust, but also for the militaristic egotism of the Prussian architects of Germany. If man with his reason and Categorical Imperative is the highest reality in the world, if the world exists only for his sake, and if he is his own ultimate authority, who will save him

from himself, from his self-centredness, from his egotism and revolt <sup>1</sup>

And again:

It was this type of egotistic idealism and romantic Titanism that, in Masaryk's opinion, was bound to end in metaphysical despair, in moral anarchism, and in political worship of power and destruction . . . Stirner, quite in the spirit of German post-Kantian idealism, declared the ego, the natural sensual ego, to be God. After Stirner came Nietzsche . . . What a terrible sequence of cause and effect? <sup>2</sup>

But though we may feel it assumes too much to trace post-Kantian perversions and aberrations back to Kant and to produce the succession, Kant—Goethe—Stirner—Wagner—Nietzsche (and presumably Hitler), it is difficult to deny that the fatal *omissions* that marred the Kantian system impaired its moral authority and weakened its defences against these destructive errors. And it remains true that, for all his nobility and prophetic insight, Kant was a child of the Renaissance. He stood too close to the evangelical, pietistic tradition to escape the sense of the sovereign authority of righteousness and the corresponding sense of the radical evil in human nature; nevertheless what he proclaims is *man's power to achieve his own perfection*. Despite all defects of nature, Man the Rationalist and Moralist stands out as possessing adequate resources in himself to make his way for himself and achieve this perfect destiny. "You can, because you should". This is the Kantian gospel.

<sup>1</sup> *Doom and Resurrection*, British edn., S.C.M. Press, 1945, p. 68.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



## 6

## ROUSSEAU

## 1

ON the day of Kant's death the people of Königsberg thought they saw a sign in the sky. A light was noticed floating across the clear heavens—a light so unusual and so bright that a little company of townsfolk gathered on the bridge to watch it. It was in fact a small cloud which, catching the rays of the sun, was flaming like a seraph; but a Prussian soldier among the sky-gazers on the bridge thought otherwise. "That", he said, pointing upward, "is Kant's soul going to Heaven". And Kant's transcendental philosophy, related cloud-like to the world of man but floating high in the ethereal element, was itself like a sign in the sky. It had caught the light of the Renaissance sun and it seemed to signal the ascent of Man's own soul toward the infinite perfection.

But already in Kant's own time there were other signs and portents, signs of disillusion and portents of something other than Man's ascent. And one of these was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. When we look into Rousseau's writings we find, it is true, much that is hopeful and glamorous, what Carlyle has called "operatic rose-pink", but we find much also that witnesses to vanity and vexation of spirit; and if that mood of half-cynical protest was in the soul of Rousseau, it was so because it belonged to his age. It must be admitted, of course, that no age has been more variously characterized. It has been called the classical age, the sceptical age, the cosmopolitan age, the age of culture, and much else. Carlyle called it a decadent age, without belief or loyalty, but full of shams and cant and pageantry. What is undeniable is that the note of criticism, radical fundamental criticism, and of disappointment and resentment, is strong. Science and art and the new learning had not worked the miracles that had been expected of them, or rather, *the miracles themselves were not producing the desired*

*results.* The condition of the world was not appreciably better: mankind might be more civilized, but they were not conspicuously happier or more virtuous. But the story unfolds plainly enough in the life of Rousseau himself, and there we shall follow it.

Somehow one is tempted to begin in the style of the old romances: "One day, in the autumn of 1749, a solitary wayfarer might have been seen hastening along the dusty road between Paris and Vincennes". At least, the road, the traveller and the date would be to the point; let us, then, note the year. In 1749 when Immanuel Kant, an obscure young man of twenty-five, was earning his living as a private tutor, Rousseau himself, likewise with a reputation to make, was thirty-seven, but a feeble constitution gave him an older appearance; and for the rest—peruke and cane, braided coat, silk breeches, white stockings, buckle-shoes—we have the conventional Rousseau picture.

He was in fact hastening along the Vincennes road that day in order to visit his friend, M. Diderot: and recalling the journey later, Rousseau remembered that the heat of the day, and the exertion of rapid walking, made him pause at intervals to regain his breath. During one of these pauses, happening to glance over a page of the *Mercure de France* which he had brought with him, and his glance happening to rest on an advertisement in an inconspicuous corner of the page, he was (he assures us) transfixed; he was as if rooted to the ground like the oak in whose shadow he was sheltering from the sun: his vision became dim; a tremor shook his frame; and, falling to the earth, he gave way to a paroxysm of convulsive weeping. For half an hour (and weeping copiously the while) he remained prostrate, and when at length he arose from the dust he observed that his waistcoat was wet with his tears.

The cause of this affecting scene was a notice in the *Mercure* that the Academy of Dijon was offering a prize for the best essay submitted on a given subject; and the given subject was, *Whether the re-establishment of the Sciences and Arts had contributed to corrupt or to purify morals.* Rousseau gives us to understand that the flood of tears which this announcement released was excited by a kind of moral ecstasy, and that the outpouring,

though it provided some emotional relief, in nowise allayed his intellectual and spiritual agitation: on the contrary, it increased, so that, when he reached Vincennes and presented himself to M. Diderot, he found himself in a state bordering on delirium.

It is possible, of course, to question (and by certain students of Rousseau's psychopathy it has been questioned) if this memorable experience—the electrification, the moral ecstasy, the tears, the wet waistcoat—ever existed outside its narrator's imaginative "recollection". Even M. Diderot appears to have cast some doubt upon it. On the other hand it is possible to urge that, in a man of Rousseau's 'extreme sensibility, a certain appositeness as between the terms of the *Mercur de France* advertisement and the circumstances of the Vincennes visit was enough to start a highly explosive train of thought and emotion.

For, unhappily, M. Diderot was at that time under detention, though his publishers, concerned that he should bestow himself upon the great enterprise of the Encyclopedia, were petitioning for his release. And certainly M. Diderot was a distinguished representative of the Sciences and Arts. He had published a Medical Dictionary, a History of Greece and other learned writings. But he had also published (anonymously) a novel whose salaciousness was, even in the Paris of that time, regarded as slightly excessive: and he was, at the moment, under detention because an essay of his on sensationalist philosophy had been considered inimical to public morals, and because it had provoked the displeasure of Madame Dupré de Saint-Maur. And now Rousseau, on his way to visit M. Diderot in these painful circumstances, was suddenly brought to a halt by the Dijon Academy's singular challenge: Were the Sciences and Arts making for the corruption or the purification of morals? With the case of M. Diderot before him, what possibilities for a resounding polemic opened up on the instant, a polemic so audacious, so unprecedented, so startling, that it must put the name of its author into the mouth and ears of the nation.

All the same, there was perhaps no obvious reason why even this should induce a moral ecstasy, or agitate Rousseau to the pitch of delirium. And, in fact, Diderot, as reported by his

friend Marmontel, relates the incident somewhat differently.

I was prisoner at Vincennes Rousseau visited me. . . . As we were sauntering together, he told me that the Academy de Dijon had just proposed an interesting question, and that he thought of treating it . . . "Which side will you take?" I asked. He answered, "The affirmative".

So that Rousseau proposed to enter the competition on the side of the Arts and Sciences as the purifiers of morals. But Diderot, it seems, had no difficulty in dissuading him from a course which all the hack-writers of Paris would be sure to follow. Clearly the line to take was the negative. From that moment, says Diderot, Rousseau chose the rôle he was to play and the mask he was to wear. We may make our choice between these two somewhat divergent versions. What is not in doubt is that Rousseau's prize-winning essay (on the negative side) proved to be the turning-point of his career

2

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in Geneva in 1712. His family was of French Protestant origin, but had been settled in Geneva for nearly two centuries. They maintained their Protestant connexions, and Jean-Jacques's mother, who died when giving him birth, was the daughter of a Protestant pastor. The boy's father, who combined clock-making with the teaching of dancing, was a restless soul, and had returned, only a year before Jean-Jacques's birth, from Constantinople, where he had worked for six years as clockmaker to the Sultan's harem. A few years later, embroiled in an affair of honour, he quitted Geneva, leaving his son in the care of the boy's uncle. Jean-Jacques was sent to school in the house of a Protestant pastor, and then, after serving in a lawyer's office and in an engraver's shop and finding neither occupation to his liking, he left home. He was sixteen and penniless. It was the beginning of the Rousseau iliad.

His first move was to attach himself to the Catholic priest of Compignon, a kindly soul, who sent him to Annecy, to a Madame de Warens, herself a convert to the Catholic Faith.

By Madame de Warens he was passed on to the Seminary of the Catechumens in Turin, when he "let himself be converted", but left soon afterwards and picked up a living as a lackey in the houses of the local gentry, and then returned to Annecy and Madame de Warens. This remarkable woman was still under thirty; she had married early and unhappily, and had separated from her husband when she embraced the Catholic Faith. Later she had come under the favourable notice of the King of Sardinia (Jules Lemaître thinks she may have served as a secret agent), and was awarded a small pension.

This kind patroness now admitted Rousseau to her house and, boy as he was, to her intimate affections. The intimacy lasted for nine years, with occasional interludes during which he studied Latin—unsuccessfully—in another Catholic seminary (which found him "deficient in the intellectual faculty"), taught music (though barely knowing the notes) in Lausanne and Neuchâtel, attached himself to a Greek archimandrite (collecting subscriptions for the Holy Sepulchre), spent a few restless days in Paris as an officer's servant, and served in the Land Survey department of the Sardinian Government. After these brief diversions he relapsed into his position of unpaying guest in Madame de Waren's hospitable establishment, throwing himself loyally, as John Morley chooses to express it, upon his patroness's narrow resources.

It was indeed a curious domestic arrangement, with Madame as indulgent "Maman" and with Jean-Jacques and the gardener on equal footing as the objects of her benevolence; and the years passed by of which he could later write: "I could have passed my whole life and eternity in this way without an instant of weariness". But his health, which was never good, began to decline, and by 1737, at the age of twenty-five, he was a confirmed neurasthenic, convinced that he was afflicted with "a polypus in the heart". Obligated to travel to Montpellier (at Madame's expense) to seek reliable medical advice, he was at length reassured, and presently returned, to find the gardener gone and the local barber installed in his place. The supplanter, it appears, was tall, loud-spoken, "flat-faced and flat-souled", and Rousseau's sensibilities were wounded. There were tears, protests and

hysterical scenes, but Madame de Warens was undissuadable, and the idyll was at an end.

By 1741 he was once more in Paris, and presently found a successor to Madame de Warens in Thérèse Levasseur, a totally illiterate young woman of gentle disposition—the poor Madame de Warens herself, meantime, beginning a slow descent to penury and ruin. He tells us that Thérèse bore him four children, and that he conveyed each one, against the mother's protests, to the Foundlings Home. As a man of sensibility, Rousseau could write inspiringly on the duties of parenthood, but there were circumstances that rendered his own observance of them inconvenient. He had been pre-occupied with a plan for a new system of musical notation (unhappily rejected by the Academy of Sciences), and had been concerned, for practical reasons, to gain access to Parisian society. He had succeeded so far as, through the favour of Madame Dupin—destined to become great-grand-mother of George Sand—to become secretary to the French Minister at Venice; but, as usual, he had thrown up his post and was back in Paris, vainly demanding justice against the Minister for alleged humiliations.

Such had been the manner of Rousseau's life up to that eventful journey along the Vincennes road to visit M. Diderot. No doubt the external facts do not tell the whole story, and may even be misleading. Diseased and neurotic though he was, Rousseau must somehow have been an attractive being. How else could he, an obscure and penniless alien, have won the favour of men of wealth and influence in Paris, and particularly of their wives? Moreover, in spite of his insistent confessions of timidity, "shamefacedness", and an embarrassing lack of fluency both of thought and of utterance, he must have had engaging conversational gifts. How else could he have been welcome, or even tolerated, in the circles of Diderot, Condillac, Voltaire and the rest? A scholar he was not, but he had sensibility to the pitch of genius, and he had fervour, even moral, humanitarian and religious fervour, if that can be called either religious or moral or humanitarian which is wholly unrelated to ethical endeavour. Withal he had literary style. Passion, poetic feeling, fancy, eloquent

invective—when he took up his pen it was as when Prospero took up his wand; the spirits were at his command.

And now he became famous overnight. The social lapdog became a lion, the literary hack a celebrity. The learned judges of the Academy of Dijon had awarded his essay the prize, but a prize incomparably richer had dropped into his lap. He was a celebrity, a man to be courted, even feared. His attack on the Arts and Sciences had all Paris by the ears, and not Paris alone. Academicians, professors, pamphleteers, all were drawn into the fray. Royalty vied with men of letters, King Stanislas of Poland and Frederick II of Prussia, with Voltaire and d'Alembert, in defending the citadel of culture against this amazing onslaught. The Duc d'Aumont conveyed the intimation that its author would not be unwelcome at the Palace, even that His Majesty might contemplate conferring a pension (for this lion must be tamed). . . . It was like a fairy tale. But to read the essay to-day is to know that one thing admits of no manner of doubt. The work would never have won for its author such celebrity if it had not spoken directly and boldly to a prevalent mood, if it had not given back to men their own secret thoughts and misgivings.

## 3

To read the essay<sup>1</sup> to-day is to marvel that a piece of writing so loose, extravagant and illogical should have produced so great a sensation. Perhaps M. Garat is right in saying that what it produced was actually a sort of admiring terror. The Renaissance had flung a rainbow of promise across Europe. Man the Thinker, Man the Scientist, was to be lord of his event, master of Nature, renovator of the world. But where was the evidence that this promise was really being fulfilled? Was civilized society really finding a new security, a new happiness, a new and godlike splendour, thanks to the New Knowledge? Or was the sun passing into an eclipse and the rainbow fading into the darkness of a new Deluge? It was to this misgiving, this secret terror, that Rousseau spoke.

He begins in conventional style with a eulogy of man and

<sup>1</sup> The direct quotations from this and other essays are taken from Dent's Everyman's Library edition of Rousseau's works.

of human culture, a eulogy perversely contrary to the argument it is intended to introduce.

It is a noble and beautiful spectacle to see man raising himself, so to speak, from nothing by his own exertions, dissipating, by the light of reason, all the thick clouds in which he was by nature enveloped, mounting above himself, soaring in thought even to the celestial regions, like the sun encompassing with great strides the vast extent of the universe . . .

and so onward to an historical review of Europe's lapse into barbarism in the Dark Age, of the revival of learning, the re-discovery of the cultural treasure of the ancient world, and the subsequent enrichment of France herself with its "precious spoils". Then suddenly out of this resplendent heaven the bolt of the real thesis crashes down: "*Our minds have been corrupted in proportion as the arts and sciences have been improved*". Greece, before these had demoralized her, was peopled with heroes; afterwards, not all the eloquence of Demosthenes could breathe new life into a body that culture had enervated. So it was later with Rome and Byzantium, so it had been earlier with Egypt, and so, always and everywhere, it must be.

What follows is a contrastive picture which henceforth was to figure in all Rousseau's philosophical writings. Mark the contrast, he urges, between these lamentable instances of cultured decadence and the nobility and happiness of the simple savage. Preserved from the contagion of useless knowledge, these children of Nature by their virtue and contentment afford an example to the rest of the world. For instance, who would not envy the Indians of the American continent—happy tribes who, without our luxury, profligacy, or slavery, but continuing in that blissful ignorance in which Providence originally placed all mankind, follow a simple and natural way of life, and enjoy a government to be preferred to the Platonic ideal or to any Utopia that philosophy can ever depict?

Let men learn for once that Nature could have preserved them from science as a mother snatches a dangerous weapon from the hands of her child. Let them know that all the secrets she hides are so many evils from which she protects them.

And what, indeed, asks Rousseau, is the pedigree of our



vaunted knowledge? Astronomy was born of superstition, geometry of avarice, physical science of vain curiosity, eloquence of ambition: so that men might well lift the hands to heaven and cry, "Almighty God! Thou who holdest in Thy hand the minds of men, deliver us from the fatal arts and sciences of our forefathers. Give us back ignorance, innocence, and poverty, which alone can make us happy, and are precious in Thy sight!"

This recurrent eulogy of Nature was perhaps the sincerest and most liberative, as it was the most characteristic, emotion to which Rousseau ever lent his pen. Natural goodness was for him the highest goodness, though what he meant by Nature, and whether he always meant the same thing, may be debatable questions. Perhaps, as M. Maritain suggests, he meant (and often at one and the same time) two different things: first, the wild, rude, primitive condition of things, and second, the essential order which looks and moves toward the end for which, by the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, it was ordained. That in Rousseau's mind these two conceptions of Nature were confused meant that he had no difficulty in promulgating his fuddled doctrine of a "natural state" which was at once the aboriginal condition of ignorance and savagery *and* the divine end to which the world should attain, at which it should stop, or to which it should, if possible, be carried back.

And after all this, the essay makes a preposterous end with a eulogy of men of science and a plea for their encouragement and protection by princely patronage.

Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, those teachers of mankind . . . what guide could have taken them so far as their sublime genius directed them? . . . Let not our princes disdain to admit into their councils those who are most capable of giving them good advice; let them enjoy the only recompense worthy of them, that of promoting by their influence the happiness of the peoples they have enlightened by their wisdom.

But after all, what happier anti-climax or *non sequitur* could have been conceived? The recital ended with bows all round—to pit, boxes and gallery. The attack upon science and the eulogy of poverty and ignorance had not been displeasing to the

Clericals, the arraignment of luxury and inequality had been agreeable to the reformers, and the plea for the royal patronage of scientists and philosophers had been as dutiful to the Court as it was grateful to the *savants*.

And now, whatever the effect of this astonishing performance upon the general public, its effect upon the author himself was immediate, and in his *Confessions* (Book 1) he describes it.

Up till then I had been good: from thenceforth I became virtuous, or at least enraptured with virtue. . . . I was truly transformed: my friends and acquaintances no longer recognized me. No longer was I the timid man, rather shamefaced than modest, who did not dare come forward or speak; who was put out by a chaffing word, and blushed at a word from a woman. Bold, spirited, intrepid, I showed everywhere an assurance which was the firmer that it was simple and lay more in my soul than in my bearing. . . . What a change! All Paris was repeating the sharp and biting sarcasms of that same man who, two years before, and ten years afterwards, never knew what he ought to say nor what words to use.

He had now to adapt himself to his new rôle as social iconoclast and apostle of the "natural state", and he did so admirably. He had once successfully posed as an Englishman without knowing a word of English; he had acted as music master with only the most elementary knowledge of music: and now to assume the style of social rebel and evangelist of the simple life was hardly a pose at all, so agreeable was it, if not exactly with his habits, at least with his mood and temper.

Accordingly he abandoned (he tells us) white stockings and gold trimmings, wore a round wig, and gave up his sword. Not unnaturally, he became a greater social success than ever (one thinks of Mr. Darling and his kennel); and when, in 1753, the Dijon Academy proposed another theme for literary discussion, *What is the origin of inequality among men? And is it sanctioned by the law of Nature?* all Paris turned to the new oracle for a new deliverance. The second essay (his "second book against the human race" was Voltaire's quip) was not awarded the Academy's prize, but it was put into the *Encyclopédie*. And once more the public were able to admire a treatise as remarkable for its confused thinking as for its literary virtuosity.

Inevitably the essay begins with a contrast between the "state of Nature" and civilized society. How, in human affairs, did it fall out that the rule of Nature was made subject to social and political laws at all? And by what unhappy sequence of miracles did the strong (the many) come to obey the weak (the privileged few)? The questions required that he should journey back in thought to that state of Nature which existed before civilization was known, and Rousseau confesses himself unable to make the journey. Indeed, so far as Man is concerned, there may never, he admits, have been a state of Nature at all: for "it is clear from Holy Scripture that the first man, having received his understanding and commandments immediately from God, was not himself in such a state".

Here Rousseau, after the manner of Buffon and others, makes his polite bow to Church orthodoxy, and, having made it, cheerfully passes on—to make the disclaimed journey to the debatable land of primitive natural man.

O man, of whatever country you are, and whatever your opinions may be, behold your history . . . not in books written by your fellow-creatures, who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies. . . . How much have you changed from what you once were! . . . You are about to inquire about the age at which you would have liked your whole species to stand still.

The tableau follows, and Primitive Man (having emerged from the sub-human state when his nails were crooked talons and he ambled on all fours) is presented "just as he must have come from the hands of Nature". He satisfies his hunger with the acorns of the first oak, and at the foot of the tree that fed him he makes his bed. Food and drink, shelter and sleep, occasional female companionship and a measure of security from predatory beasts—these are all he requires for his natural and simple happiness.

How care-free his life and how healthy! What room could there be for disease in a frame inured to the rigours of the seasons and the fatigues of the chase? What room for avarice in an existence unburdened with private possessions, or for pride in a life where rank and class were unknown, and where all shared together in the commonalty of the fruitful earth?

Delectable state ! Man, the simple savage, happy in the peacefulness of his passions, and good in the spontaneity of his sympathies ! True, he lived by instinct and not by reason and reflection. but how much better so ! “ *A state of reflection is a state contrary to Nature, and a thinking man is a depraved animal* ”. The birth of language, and thus of reason, led straight to the miseries, artificialities and vanities of civilization and away from that happy life of the senses which haunts our world like a dream of childhood.

But no sooner does Rousseau's fancy begin to play around the emergence of family-life as that of an idyllic community in miniature than he is captivated afresh. Admittedly human life was so far rationalized that the family organized itself around some notion of property, some primitive form of division of labour, of social law, and even of economics; but even so, it was superlatively good.

The more we reflect on it, the more we shall find that this state was . . . altogether the very best man could experience; so that he can have departed from it only through some fatal accident

The lamentable fall of man from his first estate of instinct is now, it appears, out of mind, and primitive domesticity, though not innocent of reason, is seen to be the true natural state of man.

What, then, was the fatal accident that destroyed this paradise? We are given the answer in two ominous words: *Agriculture* and *Metallurgy*. “ It was iron and corn that . . . ruined humanity ”. But here again the fall might have proved, if not a rise, at least a move forward, had there not been another accident—a fatal lack of balance in the organization of industry. For, after all, this extension of property to corn and iron was so far good that it gave rise to the recognition of rights, and to the first rules of justice—benefits which might have fortified human equality, if only the corn and iron enterprises had been co-ordinated. But they were not, and all was lost. Society became the great conspiracy of history—the conspiracy of the strong to enslave the weak. For “ the profoundest plan that ever entered the mind of man ” was the plan by means of which the powerful few seduced their

multitudinous victims by calling them into a social compact and then deluding them with "institutions which were as favourable to their seducers as the laws of Nature were unfavourable".

Here we have, indeed, a bolder and more aggressive Rousseau, but we are still forced to inquire what there was in so loose-hung and flimsy a piece of writing to add to its author's fame. And the answer must be that, like the first, it was a tract for the times. "We see around us", Rousseau could say (and we can allow for habitual overstatement), "hardly a single creature in civil society who does not lament his existence". To this spiritual *malaise* Rousseau appealed with an emotional sincerity which gathered strength from his own wrongs, real or imagined, and his own neurotic resentments and restlessness. That it was emotional and not ethical, that the same man of feeling who could dissolve into tears at the thought of human misery and the exploitation of the weak, who could swell with heroic enthusiasm at the very mention of virtue, and whose religious sensibility could move him to compose prayers for his mistress's devotions—that this same man would consign his newborn children one by one to the foundling asylum to avoid the inconveniences of parenthood, mattered not at all. It did not in the least abate the ardour of his rhetoric or check the effulgence of his style; and men read Rousseau not for his logic but for his fervour; they read him because what he told them seemed to come out of their own hearts as well as out of his. They shared the mood of disillusion and resentment. Something had gone wrong with the brave new world of Bacon and Descartes. The Kingdom of Man was not prospering.

Meanwhile it was hardly to be expected that the rhapsodist who extolled the natural state and the noble savage should entirely emancipate himself from Parisian society. He affected a poorer style of dress and set up as a music-copyist at ten sous a day, but he continued to dine at the tables of the rich and live under the patronage of the powerful. Socially he may now have aspired to be a bear rather than a lion ("my bear" was Madame d'Espinay's endearing nickname for him), but he was at least a tame bear; and when, in 1757, after two years in the d'Espinay household, "burdened by sorry indigestion, and

ever sighing for my own porringer", he finally took himself away, it was in order to move to fashionable Montmorency, to a house rented to him by the steward of the Prince de Condé and conveniently near the castle of Madame de Luxembourg. At Montmorency *The New Heloise* was written, full of that incomparable nature-poetry which moved Byron—and William Cowper—to admiration. It was followed, inevitably by now, by his *Emile*, for, as M. Jules Lemaitre observes, Rousseau had become by this time a sort of public Professor of Virtue and Reform, and as both are matters of education, the subject of *Emile* was clearly dictated. And so we are brought to 1762 and the *Social Contract*, Rousseau's mature and serious contribution to social philosophy.

## 4

"Men being taken as they are, and laws as they might be": this is the key and formula that opens to us the *Social Contract*. "I have to inquire", declares Rousseau, "if, in the civil order, there can be any sure and legitimate rule of administration, men being taken as they are, and laws as they might be". This means that Rousseau's concern in this treatise is not with measures for the improvement of the human race, nor is it to inquire into existing systems of government. His concern is to draw a plan for a system best suited to civilized man in his present moral and general condition.

Specifically, he proposes to "find a form of association able to defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of every associate, and of such a nature that each, uniting himself with all, may still obey only himself, and remain as free as before". Whether or not these precise terms are literally practicable, it is evident that from the outset Rousseau was looking toward some kind of democracy. By nature every man, he finds, is free; only in civilized society is he reduced to legal bondage. The problem is to find a social-political system in which man's forfeited freedom can be restored, while at the same time social cohesion and security are maintained.

Rousseau rejects all forms of paternalism. The only natural

society, he recognizes, is the family, and in a sense it is a model one; but it is a model that cannot be reproduced on a larger social scale. For the bond that holds children under the parental roof and discipline is necessarily relaxed as soon as they are of age; whereas the rule and discipline of the State over all its members never relaxes. Therefore paternalism in government rests upon an analogy that breaks down. If therefore the principle that legitimates society is not of Nature, what is its source? It cannot properly be derived from mere Force, for Force is a physical thing, it has no inherent moral authority, and cannot be the true fount of social rights and duties. Therefore if neither Nature nor Force can supply the principle, it must be sought in some *convention* which in some way provides the sovereign social sanctions.

What, then, of the claims of Monarchy? Do these sovereign sanctions—the sovereignty itself—reside in the Sovereign? If a people put itself under the authority of a ruler, is the sovereignty inalienably his and his successors? Rousseau denies it. The fact, he argues, that a people could do so means that *that people existed already as a social entity*; so that any contract between people and ruler implies an *already existing relationship* between those individuals themselves who constituted the people. And precisely here, in this original, perhaps tacit, unformulated, agreement between the individuals making up the society—in this understanding whereby they act together—we have the real fount of social sovereignty. It resides in the people themselves, and it is inalienable. They have no right to swear it away or bestow it elsewhere. The people themselves are sovereign.

It is, then, this coming together of the people to constitute a society which Rousseau envisages when he speaks of the *social contract*. And the underlying principle of such a contract should be, he contends, that each contracting individual gives himself to the society as a whole. It then follows that, each doing so, all do so; and therefore there can be no *one* individual, or section, to whom the others yield up their rights. On the contrary, the contracting parties can say: *Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and we receive, in our corporate capacity, each member as an*

*individual part of the whole.* What follows? What follows, says Rousseau, is the emergence of a collective *Person*. "At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a moral and collective body . . . receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life and its will". In a word, this collective or public *Person* becomes the Republic.

But (and here the course becomes more difficult) what is meant by the supreme direction of the general will? What is the General Will? It is not the aggregate of private wills. For it must be remembered that in so far as each individual citizen is integrated into the collective *Person* (the society), he himself is no longer a simple but a complex personality. He is his individual self with his private will, desires, interests, but he is also a part of the communal self with its larger interests and purposes, and as such he must contribute to the life of the whole. Suppose now that the individual is *not* perfectly integrated with society as a whole (which, in an imperfect world, must often happen); then there may be a clash between his supposed private interests and the interests of the society of which he is part; and, when this happens, his "better self", his social self, urges him to put the interests of the community first. When he does so, then the will behind his decision is an integral part of the General Will.

Thus we may say that the General Will is the integration of the social purposes of the community, and, properly representing the "better self" of each individual citizen, is in itself "always constant, unalterable and pure". It is, so to say (though Rousseau does not employ the term), the *logos* of the society or State. It is the General Will, and not the private wills of all, that is always, socially, right. All the same, it can never cease to be a part of the spiritual organism of each citizen; it may be repressed, it cannot be destroyed. The corrupt citizen, "even in selling his vote for money, does not extinguish in himself the general will, he only eludes it".

But here Rousseau's system comes to grief. We may, if we please, apotheosize the General Will as infallible, but there is no infallible means of sorting it out, or making it operative. In Rousseau's theoretical Republic (which has more in common



with the City-States of ancient Greece than anything modern), out of a hundred thousand votes cast, an indeterminate number may represent the *private wills* of imperfectly integrated, maladjusted or misinformed citizens, and only a minority may express the General Will. In such circumstances, what is the litmus by which we may test for this General Will? And when we have distinguished it, and extracted it, and found it to be a minority vote, what is to be done?

Rousseau sees the difficulty, and it leads him to reprehend the formation of separate political parties, which can only impede the functioning of the communal purpose by becoming centres of particular interests "Each citizen should think only his own thoughts". Alternatively, if parties must exist, they should be as numerous as possible, so that the predominance of any one may be prevented. It is all problematical, and he is obliged to confess that an absolutely pure democracy is not for this world. "Were there a people of gods, their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men". It was depressing enough; but who ever read Rousseau and really found him depressing? For the strange power of his books over the hearts and minds of men lay not in any close-knit argument or reasoned conclusion, but in their fervour, in their rich sentiment, in their sympathetic appeal.

## 5

And so we come to Rousseau's religionism. Presently he reverts from Catholicism to a rationalized Protestantism—to Deism. The religion that has social value is "the purely internal cult of the supreme God and the eternal obligations of morality", without temples, altars or rites—"the religion of the Gospel pure and simple . . . what may be called natural divine law". But he comes to feel that Christianity, like Democracy, and even in its simplest form, could not serve the Social Contract and is not for this world. There could, he discovers, be no such thing as a Christian Republic, for a society of true Christians (like a society of perfect democrats) would be a society not of men but of gods. Moreover, he

anticipates Nietzsche and finds that Christianity preaches servitude. "True Christians are made to be slaves, and they know it, and do not much mind".

The dogmas agreeable to civil religion are reduced in this way to those of the existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent God, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, and the sanctity of the Social Contract—all to be taught without comment. And for the rest, a broad tolerance should be observed, but not for intransigent Catholics: "Whoever dares to say, *Outside the Church is no salvation* ought to be driven from the State, unless the State is the Church and the Prince the Pontiff"—in which proscription, not surprisingly, M. Jules Lemaître discovers a symptom of that mental derangement which was to afflict Rousseau's last years.

For the last years were beclouded. John Morley in his *Life of Rousseau*, written at a time when Morley's militant rationalism constrained him to spell "God" with a small g, has a severe comment upon freethinking coteries: "The vanity and egoism of rationalistic sects are as fatal to candour, justice and compassion as the intolerant pride of the great churches" Rousseau suffered at the hands of them all. He had alienated himself equally from the Catholics and the orthodox Protestants, and had embittered his relations with the anti-clericals through unhappy personal feuds. A sense of isolation and persecution grew upon him, and no doubt the increasing eccentricity of his own behaviour led to further estrangements. Thus, in a society that was conservative of the minor conventions, even his sudden adoption of the Armenian costume—furred bonnet, vest, caftan and girdle—became an embarrassment to his friends. He left France for Switzerland, but his native Geneva proscribed him, and when he presented himself at the altar as a communicant of the orthodox Protestant Church, the Calvinistic clergy debarred him. How could he have expected them to do otherwise? Neither in his professed beliefs nor in his manner of life had he conformed to the standards of their Church. But to Rousseau, with his inflamed sensibility, this also was a case of persecution.

Among his solicitous friends was Hume, and in 1766, urged

by the British philosopher, he sought refuge in England. "The philosophers of Paris", declared Hume, "foretold to me that I could not conduct him to Calais without a quarrel; but I think I could live with him all my life in mutual friendship and esteem". He was lionized and fêted. Garrick gave a special performance in his honour, and the crowded house showed more interest when Rousseau took his seat in the box than when the King and Queen entered. The King granted him a pension, and through the good offices of Hume, he and his faithful Thérèse were installed in a house at Wootton, Derbyshire. But the malady had bitten too deep. He fancied himself being spied upon and conspired against, accused Hume of being in league against him with his mortal foes, and in a year he was back in France.

He was now fifty-five and a stricken man. During the English interlude he sat for his portrait, and Morley comments ponderously and with Victorian sententiousness upon the result.

It is almost as appalling in its realism as some of the dark pits that open before the reader of the Confessions. Hard struggles with objective difficulty and external obstacle wear deep furrows in the brow, and throw into the glance a solicitude, half penetrating and defiant, half dejected. When a man's hindrances have sprung up from within, and the ill-fought battle of his days has been with his own passions and morbid broodings and unchastened dreams, the eye and the facial lines that stamp character tell the story of that profound moral defeat, which is unlighted by the memories of resolute combat with evil and weakness, and leaves only eternal desolation and the misery that is formless. Our artist has produced a vision from that prose Inferno which is made so populous in the modern epoch by impotence of will, and those who have seen the picture may easily understand how largely the character of the original, at the time when it was painted, must have been pregnant with harassing confusion and distress.<sup>1</sup>

The end came in indigence and misery in 1778.

For us the consideration remains that in Rousseau we have a reaction not indeed against Renaissance humanism but

<sup>1</sup> *Rousseau*, Vol. ii, 1873 ed., p. 382.

against that new sense of civilized man's power which came with the beginnings of modern science. He turns away from science, from civilization, to Man himself and to Nature, and his obsession is with natural goodness. It is all pure Hollywood, the gelatinous virtue of the films, and yet the moving picture *is* "moving". Rousseau indoctrinated successive generations by first captivating their minds with his technicoloured fantasies "Everything helped to detach my affections from the world", he wrote of the time of his prize-essay success "I left the world and its pomps . . . I date my complete renunciation . . . from that time"; and if the anchorite was at the same time ruining a weak digestion at the table of the d'Espinays, what did it matter? "I think that never did individual of our species have less vanity than I"—"I am convinced that of all the men I have known in my life, none was better than I". It is all emotionally sincere, for the actor was carried away by his part. "All the evil I have done in my life I have done by reflection, and what little good I have been able to do I have done on impulse". And so, as M. Maritain suggests, he produced his effect by reproducing in men's souls "the waves of his sensibility, the vast tumult of his heart". He says to men in effect: "You must *be* your feeling. You must understand that you are good and that Nature is good. I who tell you this know it to be true, for I *feel* it. I myself am good, for I feel good".

This was the Rousseau virus, and he injected it into the mind of his age and into the democratic ideology. All the sham arguments about the depravity of reflection, or the corrupting influence of science and art, or of agriculture and metallurgy, were incidental to the main idea. Man was naturally good, even as Rousseau was good—none better

## COMTE

NATURE—Man—Society—these had been the themes around which Rousseau's thought had revolved, and out of which he had elaborated his naturalism, his humanitarianism and his theory of democracy. A fourth subject, Industrialism, was later to compel the attention of every social thinker, but in the France of Rousseau's day this did not constitute a problem. It was not until the eighteen-forties, when France followed the lead of England in railway construction and industrial enterprise, that the new factor became prominent. But long before this there was one man in France whose thought, eccentric and erratic though it was, anticipated the future. He died in 1825, and he was Count Claude Henri Saint-Simon.

Saint-Simon had entered the French army at the age of sixteen and had fought in the American War. Returning to Europe, he had travelled extensively and, like Descartes, had conceived it to be his mission to give himself to philosophy. His resolve, however, was interrupted by the French Revolution. In the Revolution itself he appears to have taken little part beyond voting for the abolition of titles of nobility, but, by buying up the estates of the *émigrés*, he considerably increased his fortune; and, having married, he returned to his philosophical pursuits. The marriage was soon annulled and the fortune lost, but, for the rest of his life, and often in abject poverty, he continued to pursue his philosophic design.

The parent-thought of Saint-Simon's ideas was the progress of Man and the perfecting of civilization. He was convinced that the critical analysis to which all systems and institutions had been subjected, in the era that had led to the Revolution, was in itself powerless to create a new order, and that the age was calling loudly for positive, constructive teaching. He was equally convinced that no new order that was worth maintaining could long endure unless it rested upon a religious

conception of life and drew upon corresponding empowerments of the spirit. But he was persuaded that this two-fold need could not be met either by the Catholic or the Protestant orthodoxies. Science had so changed the world and man's outlook upon it, and scientific industry would so accentuate the change in the near future, that all existing religious syntheses would be rendered obsolete. What was needed was a positive scientific religion. What was needed was a new civilization in which the scientists should take the place of the priests, in which captains of industry should supplant the captains of war, and in which industrialism itself should become a sort of church—a church whose temples were workshops, whose worship was human service, and whose Supreme Being was Humanity in its progress to perfection.

Saint-Simon elaborated his scheme into a series of postulates.

- (1) The methods of Science should be applied as rigorously to the study of social facts as to the study of natural phenomena.
  - (2) Through Science the physical, mental and moral condition of humanity could be transformed.
  - (3) In Industry political power should be placed in the hands of the producers.
  - (4) Society should be reorganized on the basis of Labour.
  - (5) To this reorganized society only producers should be admitted.
  - (6) Work should be rewarded according to merit.
  - (7) To attain this end all workers must unite.
  - (8) The three institutions, Religion, the Family, Property, are fundamental.
- Saint-Simonism, in short, was a scheme of industrial socialism, with the captains of industry as its commissars, and with a scientific-romantic humanitarianism for its religious cult.

Saint-Simon himself, dependent for his subsistence upon the charity of his relations, was no doubt improvident and full of vagaries, and once at least, harassed by misfortune and ill-health, he attempted suicide: but his disciples survived to play a not insignificant part in the Second Empire. It was Saint-Simonians (though not *as* Saint-Simonians) who took the lead in promoting the Suez Canal and who founded the first great steamship line. "There is no reason to believe", says M. Albert Leon Guérard, "that Napoleon III was ever, consciously and formally, a Saint-Simonian, but his ideal coincided with theirs. Industrialism and Socialism com-

bined . . . was the economic formula of the Second Empire"<sup>1</sup>. But also the dreamer's ideas were to be taken over and elaborated—with very reluctant and meagre acknowledgments—by a younger disciple whose mathematical mind was able to systematize them to an extent beyond the capacity of Saint-Simon himself

# 1

In 1826, a year after Saint-Simon's death, Auguste Comte, then a young man of twenty-eight, and newly married, opened his house to the intellectuals of Paris for a series of lectures, to be delivered by himself. His academic qualifications were not impressive. He had been expelled from the Paris Polytechnic School, and from the age of eighteen had supported himself by tutorial work. But in his early twenties he had been brought under the influence of Saint-Simon, then in his declining years, and the stimulus of that association had been liberative and decisive. In the older man's doctrines he discovered, in fact, ideas with which he himself had toyed in his youth, and his design was, now, to formulate them in a series of lectures. Unhappily the excitement of the enterprise unbalanced his mind, the series had to be discontinued, and the distraught philosopher attempted suicide.

Nursed back to health by his wife, Comte began, in 1830, the publication of his *Course of Positive Philosophy* in six volumes, a task that engaged him for twelve years. But, as with Rousseau, an excitable mind, extreme sensibility, and lack of financial resources combined to unsettle his life. His marriage proved a failure, and he was saved from destitution only by the timely help of his friends (among them John Stuart Mill). This help he came to regard more as a meagre acknowledgment of a debt owed to him than as a token of friendship, and his benefactors easily fell under his suspicion. Late in life he conceived an "ideal passion" for a Madame Clotilde de Vaux, and his philosophy passed into a mystical phase. In this last phase he elaborated in detail that "Religion of Humanity" of which he regarded himself as Founder and High Priest. When he died, in 1857, in his sixtieth year, his personal following had dwindled to a mere handful of devotees.

<sup>1</sup> *French Prophets of Yesterday*, 1913, p. 168.

The summary of these bare external facts, however, gives us no clue to the extraordinary interest which the Comtist system excited in its day: moreover, it is difficult for us to appreciate now—so completely has that interest subsided—the full measure of the prestige that Comtism once enjoyed and the influence it exerted over serious minds. It may be well to note, therefore, that Falckenberg, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, could describe Comte as incomparably the most influential French philosopher of that period, and that G. H. Lewes, half a century earlier, in his Preface to the English edition of Comte's *Philosophy of the Sciences*, could—without risk of ridicule—commend that work as expounding “the leading ideas of the greatest thinker of modern times”. And though, in France itself, as M. Guérard remarks, the personal direct authority of the master was limited, the influence of his ideas upon such writers as Sainte-Beuve, Taine, and Renan was considerable. We must remember, moreover, that the Positivist movement as such owed its origin to Comte.

For us, the significance of Comte lies in the fact that his system, fantastic and even ridiculous though it was in some of its aspects, brought to a climax the scientific humanism which we noted first in Francis Bacon. In Bacon the emphasis fell on the methodological observation of natural phenomena: in Descartes this emphasis was deflected toward what may be called a mathematical rationalism: in both the sphere of religion was carefully fenced off, and within that sphere faith was supposed to move unfettered. Thus there were two worlds, the transcendent world of God, eternity, and the soul, belonging to the domain of Revelation, and the phenomenal world of Nature, of fact, of observable law, belonging to the domain of Reason.

But this delimitation of territories, with its tentative concordat between Theology and Science, did not last. For Descartes, the main function of God was that of *guaranteeing* the validity of reason and explaining those aboriginal initiations of the physical processes which reason could observe only in actual operation. In other words, God was the *necessary* hypothesis. By the time of Voltaire He was no more than a



*convenient* hypothesis. For Hume and the materialistic school He was the *unnecessary* hypothesis: and the world of transcendent reality was abandoned altogether. In Rousseau we observe the inevitable disenchantment. The reign of Reason, of Science, of Law, was not producing the results in human virtue and happiness that might be desired. 'Perhaps, suggests Rousseau, it would be better to let Man be ruled by Nature rather than to have Nature exploited by Man: perhaps the simple ignorant savage was a nobler and happier being than the civilizee. In Kant we have a supreme attempt to restore to man the lost world of transcendent reality—God, Freedom, Immortality. But the foundation remains rationalistic; Revelation is ruled out, and what is provided is a religion of morality in which the Moral Law, resting immediately upon man's rational nature, becomes the central reality.

What followed? So far as France was concerned, what followed were three revolutions: the great French Revolution (which occurred in Kant's lifetime), the revolution of 1830, and (in 1852) the *coup d'état* of Napoleon III. The French Revolution, which promised to universalize the reign of Reason, left a new and bitter feeling of frustration and disenchantment; the later revolutions, bringing no deliverance, and leaving unsolved the problems—not least of all the spiritual problems—of the first, perpetuated the sense of disillusion. Meanwhile Science had established itself—firstly, Cartesian, mathematical, rationalistic science, and secondly Baconian, methodological, experimental science—the one dogmatical and the other pragmatist; but neither had availed to bring in the promised Kingdom of Man and diffuse through the world the blessings of peace and happiness. Something had gone wrong.

Moreover, there was a new menace of anarchy. The Napoleonic wars had sowed the seeds of nationalism, and the new consciousness of nationality among the subject peoples was threatening to split Europe up into an increasing number of national States. Such a condition, as Saint-Simon clearly saw, might lend itself to reconstruction and unity only if a central dynamic principle, an inspirational power, existed around which the new unity could be formed; and, with the passing of the Holy Roman Empire, no such power existed, even in name,

Voices were not wanting that called men back to the Church. meaning by that the forsaken authoritarian standards of medieval Catholicism. But Europe could not turn back. The Protestant Reformation, the new Science, the Age of Reason, the era of rationalistic criticism and analysis, could not be cancelled. Nor was a substitute to be found in evangelical Protestantism: for Protestantism, though powerful, was essentially individualistic and had no word of social and international synthesis.

It was in this situation that the smoking embers of Renaissance humanism, stirred by revolutionary events and blown upon by the veering winds of doctrine and controversy, flamed skyward. Man must prove himself master of his event. From his own inward resources he must construct a new religion, a new culture, a new civilization, a new world. This also, as we have noted, was Saint-Simon's dream. The secret of Comte's influence, and of his significance for us in these studies, is that he appealed directly to this new and desperate resurgence of self-confident humanism.

## 2

According to Comte, the history of the human race passes through three main stages, (1) the Theological, (2) the Metaphysical, and (3) the Positive. In their early development men were ruled by their theologies, in the sense that everything in life and Nature was explained by reference to the action of divine or demonic personal beings. According to the number of these more or less man-like beings, belief took the form of either fetishism or polytheism, or of monotheism. The first stage, therefore, was one in which imagination and feeling were under the spell of magic and religion. In the second stage men, reflecting upon the world, found a certain orderliness and consistency in things; thus the conception of ruling "forces" or "principles" became prominent; imagination and feeling were reinforced and disciplined by reason, and, as the gods retired, Philosophy emerged to interpret Nature and life in terms of law and of metaphysical theory. The third (and modern) stage finds men neither theologically nor meta-

physically minded, but intent upon positive science, and summoning imagination, feeling, and reason to concentrate upon the building up of human society.

For, according to Comte, these three stages of intellectual development are accompanied by three corresponding stages in civilization, of which the last stage, dominated by Positivism, will fulfil itself in an industrial organization of society in which the Great Thought (positive scientific philosophy) will be united to the Great Power (organized industry). And because this social task can be achieved only through a comprehensive scheme which rests upon positive experimental knowledge, the first necessity is a systematic classification of the sciences.

To this task Comte addressed himself. In the six volumes of his *Positive Philosophy* he expounded encyclopædically what he denominated the five abstract sciences, Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, arranging them in an ascending order of complexity, and contending that they were correlated by a serial combination of laws. By "laws" he meant, however, no more than *general facts*: for Comte accepted the extreme empiricism of Hume and denied the existence, so far as human knowledge was concerned, of any absolute principles, first causes or final ends. All we could know was *relative* and pertained to the facts and sequences of observed phenomena. Of these, and these alone, our knowledge might be "positive". T. H. Huxley, reviewing the Comtian scheme a generation later, dealt caustically with its "long-winded confusion" and "second-hand information", and in general with the "unreality and mere bookishness" of Comte's scientific knowledge; but there is no denying that it was an ambitious and, superficially, an impressive, attempt to lay the foundations of a new cosmology.

But Comte went further. Criticizing Descartes for failing to apply his mechanistic hypothesis to intellectual and moral, as well as physical, phenomena, he himself proceeded to repair the omission. The "functions of the affections and the intellect", which the Cartesians had allowed to remain in the sphere of metaphysics and theology, he accordingly treated as a positive science under the name of Social Physics. This had

been projected by Saint-Simon, but to Comte must belong the credit of elaborating it and forcing it upon the attention of the world. What now, in fact, emerged to crown the abstract sciences in the Comtian scheme was Sociology, the science of human society, and with it from the general scientific synthesis, a philosophy—an attempt to interpret the world and human history by the *organum* of one general principle. This was the *Philosophie positive* with its three-fold division of history.

The philosopher had to meet one obvious difficulty. If we study the development of an oak from an acorn, or the activities of bees or ants, we are provided with regular and calculable sequences. In the life of man and society we are baffled by the incalculable factor—by the distinctively human element. Comte's reaction to this difficulty was curious. Without by any means denying the volitional freedom of the human *psyche*, he dismissed Psychology as "metaphysical" and therefore, of course, obsolete. In its place he put—Phrenology. Thanks to "the illustrious Gall" and the equally illustrious Spurzheim, this substitution, he believed, was already effected, and the new system had "clearly manifested all the indications which can guarantee the indestructible vitality of scientific conceptions". But, apart from this, regular study would, he was convinced, disclose "the laws (general facts) of the continuous variation of human opinion". And for the rest, because social complexity reaches its climax in man as a self-determining being, and because this, leaving room for human responsibility, leaves room also for Education, it was possible for Positive Philosophy to "modify in almost any direction" so flexible and sensitive an organism as human society.

But now Comtism entered upon a new phase. Comte, it must be understood, was by no means a thorough-going materialist. We have his own word for it.

Were it not for the pride induced by metaphysical scientific studies, it would be inconceivable that any atheist, modern or ancient, should have believed that his vague hypotheses . . . were preferable. . . . The Order of Nature is doubtless very imperfect in every respect; but its production is far more compatible with the hypothesis of an intelligent Will than with that of a blind

materialism. Persistent atheists would therefore seem to be the most illogical of theologists; because they occupy themselves with theological problems and yet reject the only appropriate method of handling them.<sup>1</sup>

Pantheism is similarly dismissed as "nothing but a relapse, disguised under learned terms, into a vague and abstract form of Fetishism". The original Comtian position was that God, whether He exist or not, is unknowable. He is for man a metaphysical hypothesis, and therefore belief in Him could have no place in a positivist philosophy

But about 1842 began Comte's "objective communion" with Madame de Vaux, whose death in 1845 profoundly affected him, and this period marked a reorientation of his views. Science was no longer the basis of his system. At bottom he declares, in a private letter, *Science is as really preliminary* as Theology and Metaphysics, and must be "*finally eliminated* by the universal Religion" "I venture", he adds, even to refuse to the sciences the attribute of full positivity"; and he came to distinguish between Religious Positivism and a merely intellectual Positivism. Those who, like most of his English followers, elected to remain "intellectuals" he now regarded as his enemies.

What was the new thesis? We have noted the main outline already. Comte recognized that the great unifying principle of Order in the Middle Ages was the religious principle. It was embodied in the Holy Roman Empire with its twin authorities of Church and Throne. This unity had collapsed at the centre, leaving Europe without any regulative and controlling power. France had sought to put the Revolution in the place of the lost centre, but the Revolution had failed. And it had failed because it had been able neither to generate the necessary spiritual power nor to achieve the necessary political consistency and constancy. What it had done was to excite a general discontent with traditional institutions and a widespread desire for reform. It had signally failed to meet that discontent and that reformist challenge with the moral and spiritual equivalent of a Church—a Church which could really mould men's beliefs and ideals. Therefore, he concludes, "it

<sup>1</sup> *A General View of Positivism*, English ed., 1865, p. 50.

is becoming recognized that the only firm basis for a reform of our political institutions is a complete reorganization of opinion and life, and the way is open for the new religious doctrine to direct the work ”.

Humanity, in short, was waiting for the new Faith which should play the part in the modern world that the Christian Faith had played in the medieval world. “ The first social need of Western Europe is community in belief and in habits of life, and this must be based upon a uniform system of education controlled and applied by a spiritual power that shall be accepted by all ”. As Huxley put it, what Comte designed was Catholicism without Christianity.

## 3

What, then, was to be the character of the new Faith? Briefly stated, it was, at least as first conceived, to be a body of positive beliefs rooted and grounded in science. All metaphysical dogma was to be excluded, and a civilization, trained to a scientific attitude and temper of mind, was to be sustained by a creed derived from the tested certainties of scientific knowledge. The pressing problem, manifestly, was not that of doctrine (for the six volumes of *Positive Philosophy* supplied material in abundance); the problem was that of inspirational power. An articulated structure of positive scientific affirmations, however acceptable to the reason, might conceivably fail to appeal to the imagination and feeling; and with God, the soul, and immortality necessarily excluded as “ metaphysical ”, the possibility, no doubt, had to be regarded seriously.

But the difficulty was confidently met by the philosopher. The supreme being and dynamic centre of the new Faith should be *Humanity* itself: for nothing, it was argued, could be better calculated to captivate the imagination and stimulate the social and ethical emotions. By means of this one conception, it seemed, the obsolete theologies would be successfully superseded and a synthesis established more vital and enduring than that of the bygone orthodoxy. For what could more admirably represent that conception of Social

Love which must be fundamental to the religion of the future than the idea of the Collective Being of mankind itself?

Clearly, says Comte, the very constitution of this great Being which we call Humanity is that of a unity made up of those distinct elements whose collective existence depends entirely upon the mutual love which knits them together. Again, the conception, while stimulating the imagination and the social sympathies, also enlarges the scope and vision of the intellect, for it obviously calls for high powers of generalization even to conceive of this vast organism, so much more complex than any other, and to comprehend the internal and external conditions of its existence. And yet again, not only are the feelings, the imagination and the intellect stimulated, but also the will to action receives special empowerments. For devotion to Humanity does not mean the passive contemplation of static Perfection, but the active service of that great Being whose development is continuous through the ages. Therefore,

toward Humanity, who is for us the only true Great Being, we, the conscious elements of whom she is composed, henceforth direct every aspect of our life, individual or collective. Our thoughts will be devoted to the knowledge of Humanity, our affections to her love, our actions to her service.

Humanity in this way becoming the centre toward which imagination, feeling, reason, and will, converge, its worship becomes the true Catholicism, which must supersede the old and bind the world into a vaster, and an enduring, unity.

We may note that here, at the centre of his new system, Comte commits himself to a curious inconsistency. For at the same time that he announces the exclusion of the metaphysical hypothesis and dismisses to Limbo all faiths that involve metaphysical conceptions, he himself founds his Religion of Humanity on a major metaphysical assumption. For to postulate Humanity as a great Being, not rhetorically as a poetic figure, but definitively as an object of knowledge and of worship, is certainly to begin with a metaphysical assumption of the first importance. For the entity whom Comte calls Humanity is, by all physical reckoning, simply the total aggregation of individual human beings, past and present. To

assume that this aggregation is itself a Being, "the only true Great Being", is to pass into the region that Comte had placed out of bounds—the region of metaphysical hypothesis.

Moreover, for an object of worship designed to displace the religious conception of God, Comte's Great Being had the fatal defect of imperfection: so that a religion intended to be the Faith of the entire human race, and designed to be such because the recognized perversions and disabilities of the race needed its corrective empowerments, did no more than invite imperfect mankind to the worship of their own metaphysical totality. This was, moreover, to commit mankind to perpetual self-reference, and to a Narcissus-like self-worship, which, for man, must always be the way to madness.

Here, nevertheless, we have the threefold Comtian conception: first, the classification and correlation of the sciences, culminating in "social physics" or sociology; second, the elaboration of a scientific or "positive" philosophy, dividing human history into three stages, theological, metaphysical and scientific (positive); and third, the elaboration of a "positive" Religion of Humanity in which Collective Man is worshipped as the Great Being. A fourth aspect remained: the project of a World Republic through the agency of a World Church. And however fantastic this dream may have been, the fantasy contained one element of moral realism.

For Comte, the crucial problem of world-unity was moral and spiritual. It was the problem of shifting the balance, not in ethical theory, but in the actual world of man, from the self-regarding motives ruled by the instinct of self-preservation, to the social motives ruled by love. No enduring World Republic was possible, he saw, without the subjection of self-interest to collective interest. Positive Philosophy might have on its side the physiological law that organs and functions are strengthened by regular exercise and atrophied by prolonged inaction; it could teach that Social Feeling could be developed through exercise to a strength superior to Selfish Feeling, and that egoistic propensities and racial rivalries could be correspondingly diminished through restriction and disuse; but *by what power could individuals, classes and peoples be persuaded to put this teaching into effect?* It was the cruciality of this



question which drove him to mix with his Positivism a bizarre form of mysticism and thus to look beyond a scientific philosophy to a world religion and a world church.

Comte was able to convince himself that the stream of history and the general course of events were favourable to the planting of his new Church in Western Europe, whose peoples, duly evangelized, would form the nucleus of the new world-organization. In brief, France, the German countries and England, "with which may be classed the United States", were to be the first sphere of operations, with Poland, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece appended. Under the spiritual stimulus of the new Church, the political synthesis was to follow, and the Western Republic would take form. There would be a permanent Council of the new Church, sitting "usually in Paris", and while external order would be maintained by the autonomous national governments within the Republic, the Council would carry on its European propaganda as a whole, and, through the diffusion of Positivism, gradually bring to an end "the spiritual interregnum which is now the sole obstacle to social regeneration".

And so we have the sorry futilities that engaged Comte's mind in his later years. The new Republic was to have a new Calendar, and the names of the months were to be associated with the Saints of Humanity (January was to be Moses, February Homer, March Archimedes, October Descartes, etc.). An order of Priests of Humanity was to be created, and special recognition paid to women. For Gall's Phrenology had shown that in the brain of woman the organs of affection were superior to the organs of the intellect, and this affective principle of the feelings was now, for Comte, all-important and entitled Woman to a special place of spiritual leadership.

Another privileged class were to be the masters of industry, and, since "great duties imply great powers", capitalists, with the bankers at their head, would be granted large prerogatives. Prominence was to be given to religious ritual and ceremony, including nine sacraments, and there were to be public festivals of Order, of Solidarity, of Progress, and much else. On the secular side, an international coinage was to be minted, an international university and an international navy estab-

lished, and the designs for flags were discussed with solemn particularity.

To speak first of the banner to be used in religious services: it should be painted on canvas. On one side the ground should be white; on it would be the symbol of Humanity personified by a woman of thirty years of age, bearing her son in her arms. The other side would bear the religious formula of Positivists, *Love is our Principle, Order is our Basis, Progress is our End*, upon a ground of green, the colour of hope. . . . Green, too, would be the colour of the political flag, common to the whole West. As it is intended to float freely, it does not admit of painting, but the carved image of Humanity might be placed at the banner-pole.

It is all pathetic enough; and the philosopher becomes increasingly dictatorial. There must, he finds, be "a fraternal aristocracy among my disciples", and the spirit of subordination is "peculiarly requisite in the priests of Humanity, to form a sufficient bond between them and the Universal Pontiff"; and M. Comte was, of course, the Universal Pontiff. Also Madame de Vaux was to be worshipped as the symbol of Humanity. ("Whatever may be the final forms of our public worship, I have reason to feel that she, to whom I owe an incomparable inspiration, will be chosen, as she has been in my private devotions, to personify the Great Being".) Further, there must be an enlargement of the new Church's political influence through a bureau of secret information. "*True believers will soon feel themselves bound to furnish to the priesthood the information as to persons without which its influence would be too uncertain*". "You know", he writes to his friend Georges Audiffrent, "how the Catholic régime was once seconded by the communications rightly made by domestics with respect to their masters". . . . And to his English friend, Richard Congreve, he writes: "*It should be our policy to ratify the abolition of Parliamentary rule and [to ratify also] the definitive preponderance of the principle of a dictatorship under the right conditions*".

It was to be, as Huxley said, Catholicism without Christianity, with M. Comte as Pope and Madame de Vaux in place of the Blessed Virgin; and the new pontiff even sends an emissary to the head of the Jesuit Order to discuss a possible *rapprochement*. But "nothing", he discovers, "is possible in Italy but by sub-

stituting the Parisian religion for the Roman ". So the Man-god of Comte, like the Superman of Nietzsche, rides the philosopher's mind over the abyss.

On the whole, then, it can hardly be maintained that the refusal of the upholders of the traditional Faith to surrender at sight to the new Comtian dogma was a sign of culpable prejudice; but it must be repeated that, for our present studies, Comte has, none the less, a special significance. In the first place, his early exclusive emphasis upon the positive affirmations of Science, and his consequent rejection of metaphysics, was a genuine expression of the new mood and temper of his time. Superficially, at any rate, his philosophic edifice, with positive empirical knowledge for its foundation, the co-ordinated sciences for its superstructure, and sociology for its dome, was imposing and attractive, and was, in fact, the explanation of the wide appeal which his system made to serious and cultivated minds.

Not less attractive at a time when, as Ruskin complained, "the iron roads" were "tearing up the surface of Europe as grapeshot do the sea", was the idea of the collective industrialized life of Humanity. But Comte is also significant in his later recognition that an age of reason, working within the bounds of the co-ordinated sciences, needs for the realization of its grandiose enterprises a dynamic which knowledge cannot supply—in his discovery that *heart-power* is indispensable, and may be more important than reason itself; that, in short, the initiating, formative and sustaining force in human society is religion. Nor can we deny significance to Comte's postulate that the age demands, therefore, a Religion of Humanity and that no religion can make good its claim to be such unless it has a body of doctrine which can command universal rational respect.

In all this Comte spoke to the condition and mood of his time; and it was altogether in keeping with that mood that religion should be evaluated, like steam-power or electricity, by its *utility* in the service of human enterprise. And supremely he is significant in proclaiming as the Religion of Humanity a religion of which Humanity itself should be the centre. To

Comte, as to Nietzsche, must be given credit for carrying the half-thoughts and vague, tacit, unformulated assumptions of his age to their logical conclusions and, so to say, dramatizing them. Nietzsche did so with the Western idea of Power and Domination, Comte with the idea of Man.

Since the Renaissance with its exaltation of the natural man, the drift of human thought had been toward anthropocentrism ("man-centredness"); Comte carried it forward to its final definitive expression in anthropolatry. Humanity becomes the Supreme Being, the centre of its own Religion, the sole object of its own worship. And in Comte's own mental history we can follow the consequences. Anthropocentrism, passing into anthropolatry, ends in the aberrant egotism of a self-constituted Universal Pontiff and in the mad dream of a world dictatorship abetted by priestly espionage.

## KARL MARX

UP to the present we have traced something of the course of the revolutionary changes which, from the time of Francis Bacon to the beginning of the nineteenth century, took place in man's thoughts about himself and the world. But the revolutionary changes were by no means confined to the realm of thought; the world itself had been transformed. The predictions of Bacon and Descartes had so far been vindicated that the new knowledge had certainly placed new powers in the hands of man and opened the way to undreamed of mechanical achievement. Between 1764, when Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, and 1802, when the first steamboat was launched, soon to be followed by railways and the electric telegraph, the whole pattern of civilization was altered. Exploration, colonization, and commercial navigation opened up new markets, and America, India, Africa, and China, calling for the multiplication of commodities of exchange, were answered by means of new methods of industrial production. Manufacture passed into "machinofacture", and each new development and expansion of capitalistic industry led to corresponding social and political changes. The old classes and the old ways of life were outmoded, new interests and new antagonisms engaged society, the "bourgeoisie" and the "proletariat" began to divide the world.

It is possible to argue<sup>1</sup> that there was nothing in this new industrialism itself to disturb the balance between man and nature, or lead to those evils of urban congestion and megalopolitanism, of overcrowding and underfeeding, which became the bane of the new era, and which gave point to Talleyrand's *dictum*, "He who has not lived in the years near to 1789 does not know how sweet life can be". It has been contended that, but for the Napoleonic wars, there would have been sanity enough in Europe to have adjusted industrialism to the true rhythm of

<sup>1</sup> See R. B. Mowat, *The Age of Reason*, 1934, p. 20, etc.

social progress, but that the wars, with the immense acceleration of production which they involved, disturbed the balance. What is certain is that the equilibrium was lost, and that a new order of problems and distresses confronted the world

## 1

Into this vexed world, on May 5th, 1818, in the Prussian town of Treves, Germany, Karl Marx was born. His parents were Jews and his forbears on both sides of the house had been rabbis. When he was a child of six his father, Herschel Marx, professed conversion to the Protestant Faith and received the baptismal name of Heinrich. There is apparently no evidence that this change signified more than that Heinrich Marx, having ceased to believe in the tenets of Judaism, desired to improve the worldly prospects of his family by conforming to the established Lutheran religion. He was a lawyer by profession, mild, kindly, and well-read, and he saw to it that his children should receive the best education obtainable. At the age of seventeen Karl, who was the eldest son, entered the University of Bonn, later passing to the University of Berlin; and in 1841, at the age of twenty-three, he obtained his doctorate from the University of Jena.

It was at Berlin that Marx received the formative influences of his life; and it happened that it was the time when the criticism of the Scriptures, introduced by Spinoza and Reimarus, was concentrating upon the Gospels. In 1835 Strauss had published his celebrated *Life of Jesus* in which he had denied the trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives. The stories, he argued, were made up of myths and legends which had been unconsciously developed within the Christian communities. Strauss's book was followed, a few years later, by Bruno Bauer's critical treatises in which the Gospel narratives were treated, not as the product of unconscious mythopœic tendencies, but as deliberate fabrications by writers who were influenced by Græco-Roman and Alexandrian ideas. Bauer, as it happened, was a tutor at Berlin University; he and Marx became friendly, and, to the younger man at least, the yeasty brew of theological disputation was intoxicating. He joined a

circle of students who met regularly for the discussion of all such controversial topics and who looked for a new age free of the trammels of any sort of religious authority

For this, in Marx's case, there was perhaps an extra and personal motive. He was of Hebrew origin—in physical appearance undisguisedly and strikingly so; he had inherited the age-old resentment of his people for the dominant orthodoxies, Catholic and Protestant, that had proscribed them; and the fact that his own parents had so far bowed to the stress of circumstances as to become nominally Christian may only have sharpened this resentment. If local Jewry regarded his family as apostate and accursed, that attitude did not put him in nearly so false a position as did the attitude of official Christianity, which regarded him as a Christian. He wished to be neither a Jew nor a Christian, and he was already a rebel who desired the destruction of all the orthodoxies.

Above all, according to Otto Rühle's well-documented study, he desired to assert *himself*. He was neurotic, heady, impatient of restraint, but no youthful caprice deflected him from the ambition to achieve the extraordinary. He would tear down or build up, but he would compel a world that he defied and a society that he despised to take note of him. It was this spirit of self-assertion, of *bravura*, thinks Rühle, that prompted him even in his courtship of Johanna (Jenny) von Westphalen, a German girl of noble birth and of much higher social position than his own. "We cannot", says Rühle, "but regard young Marx's impetuous and successful wooing as an act of conquest . . . on the part of a youth who at heart was dubious as to his own prestige." It must certainly be added that the sincerity and depth of his affection for "Jenny" remained the one constant light of his stormy career.

But in Berlin, with its student coteries of the Left, and their mutinous enthusiasms, there was one power to be reckoned with, which young Marx could not avoid: there was Hegel. It is true that Hegel was dead—he had died some ten years before Marx entered the University; but Hegelianism was alive and dominant. It is difficult for the present generation to understand the immensity of its influence, but it is true that it spread over Europe more like a fever than a philosophy. Kierkegaard,

who hated it, described its effect as the "howling madness" of the "higher lunacy", but it was rife in Copenhagen as elsewhere, so that Hegelian catchwords were on the tongues of butchers and barbers and errand-boys and were displayed in trade advertisements. A philosophy that had won so amazing a popularity might reasonably be suspect, but the Hegelian system commanded respect as not unworthy of the Kantian succession; and, so long as Hegelianism survived, metaphysics were entrenched behind formidable defences.

According to the Hegelian system, the universe derives from Spirit. Free unconditioned absolute Spirit objectifies and "alienates" itself in the world of space and time, and in that relation ceases to be unconditioned, absolute and free. But this transition of Spirit from one mode of being to its opposite is simply the "dialectical" process by means of which Spirit not only meets and overcomes opposition but takes up the opposite into itself and thus becomes All in all. So the famous Hegelian formula was that of "position, negation, and sublation", or, "thesis, antithesis, synthesis": the consummating synthesis is possible only by means of the antithesis which challenges the original thesis. History, in this view, is therefore the record of the "dialectical" development of Spirit in the world of man, the outworking of the divine idea through the events and contradictions of time. The State is the institutional embodiment of that Idea in this present antithetical stage. For the Spirit that is worshipped in Religion, sensuously expressed in Art, and intellectually apprehended in Philosophy, is represented as it were synthetically by the State, which brings all these representations together into a unity. "The goal of attainment is Spirit in its completeness"; and while Religion is Reason in the sphere of the soul, and Art is Reason in the sphere of the senses, and Philosophy is Reason in the sphere of the intellect, the World (and the ideal World State) is Reason in the sphere of their total combined activities. "All that is real is rational, and all that is rational is real".

The wide appeal of Hegelianism is not difficult to understand. It spoke to the condition of an age that, in the years before the climax of 1848, found all its traditional standards being threatened by the rising tides of revolutionary thought. The



Bible, the Church, the Monarchy, the social order, all were menaced. Hegelianism offered a new centre around which they could be reorganized into an intellectually coherent unity; so that, while Christian theology welcomed the Hegelian dialectic as a new medium for the re-statement of the Faith, the Prussian State gave the system something like official status as expounding the divine right of the governing authority. But so long as Hegelianism was dominant, metaphysics had its all but impregnable defences and the advance of the radical anti-religionists was held up.

As for Marx himself, he too was halted. Early in 1837 he wrote to his father that he found himself faced with a spiritual crisis. The veil, he said, had been rent, his holy of holies shattered, and new gods had to be found for the vacant shrine. In earlier days (he continued) the gods had dwelt above the world; now they must be sought at its centre.

I had read fragments of the Hegelian philosophy and had found its grotesque craggy melody unpleasing. I wished to dive into the ocean once again, but this time *with the definite intention of discovering our mental nature to be just as determined, concrete and firmly established as our bodily* . . .<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could be more ingenuous than this rhetorical confession. What the seeker is to "discover" is nominated before the plunge is made—namely, that man no less than the physical universe is interpretable in terms of materialistic determinism. Accordingly (he tells his father) he set to work to write a philosophical-dialectical thesis on Hegelianism, but adds: "I myself can now scarcely make head or tail of it", and "this darling child of mine, nurtured in moonshine, bears me, like a false-hearted siren, into the clutches of the enemy"—the enemy being presumably metaphysics. "Overwhelmed with vexation, I was for several days quite unable to think. Like a lunatic I tore up and down the garden, beside the Spree's dirty water"—and so on in stormy style.

But, at any rate, he had "got to know Hegel from beginning to end": he had also got to know very clearly his own mind and

<sup>1</sup> Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx*, English ed. (Allen and Unwin), 1929, p. 21. (The italics are not in the original)

intention. The gods must be sought within the world and not above it, and if the young philosopher resolved to plunge anew into the general welter of speculation it was only with "the definite intention of discovering" what he wished to discover. Here indeed was no philosophic quest, nothing characterized by that "freedom of indifference", or impartiality, which Descartes had extolled, but rather a sort of inverted mysticism or fanaticism. Spirit must be dethroned and metaphysics overthrown. Whatever of animating force that could be admitted must be found to be an immanent energy within the world, and the mind and nature of man himself must be no less determined than the body and its conditioned reflexes. These were the foregone conclusions and this, already, was the Marxian bias. At nineteen Marx, like the medieval Scholastics, was working from *a priori* propositions. The difficulty which set him tearing "like a lunatic up and down" was the difficulty of working them out to a convincing conclusion.

Deliverance came with almost apocalyptic suddenness. In 1841 Feuerbach published his *Essence of Christianity*: the book fell into Marx's hands, and the vision was made clear. For Feuerbach's thesis was simple and his elaboration of it moving and convincing. Instead of devoting himself, like Strauss and Bauer, to a critical examination of the Gospels, Feuerbach had been concerned to show that the whole phenomenon of Christianity was essentially nothing but a natural projection of the human heart; it was the flowering of that religious sentiment which in fact owed nothing to any supposititious transcendent reality whatsoever, but was rooted in Nature and the good earth. It was Nature, not God, that was necessary to religion; God was simply a fantasy created by man out of his own essence.

Perhaps this, as Engels came later to suspect, was very much like an attempt to prove that the essence of Alchemy was chemistry, and that the philosopher's stone was a negligible consideration; but at the time it seemed otherwise, and the inspired volume was hailed with lyrical fervour. "One must himself", wrote Engels long afterwards, "have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general. We all became Feuerbachians". With one blow,

it seemed, Feuerbach had pulverized not only Christianity but also Hegelian idealism. Absolute Spirit was no more; the energies of Nature and Man were in control. "Who has annihilated the dialectic of concepts?" exclaimed Marx, and answered, "Feuerbach!" "Who", he repeats, "has put Man in the place of the old lumber, and in place of the infinite consciousness . . . ? Feuerbach, and no one else!"

It was indeed a delirious moment. And presently, scornful now of the relatively petty effusions of Strauss and Bauer, Marx launched at their diminished heads a satirical lampoon entitled *The Holy Family; Or a Criticism of Critical Criticism*—the "holy family" being his old friend Bruno Bauer, Bruno's brother, and their circle of disciples.

It was not in the nature of things that this mood of rhapsodical exuberance should last, and soon Marx was reflecting that even the new-found hero and liberator had grave defects. Four years later, in Brussels, he jots down in his note-book the comment that Feuerbach makes too much of theoretic contemplation and too little of action. "Consequently", he adds, "in the *Essence of Christianity*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-Jew form of appearance". Moreover Feuerbach was only half materialist, the other half of him was idealist. The "dirty-Jew" gibe is gratuitous.

Marx perceived, in short, that the Feuerbachian thesis must be pushed much farther, or entirely refashioned. After all, Hegel and the philosophy of the Absolute Idea, with all the defences it provided for theologians, religionists, and day-dreaming theorists, could not be finally overthrown by grandiloquent rhetoric about Nature and Love and the Spirit of Man; they could be deposed only when the Hegelian System itself was captured for materialism and the social revolution; and Marx did not doubt that he himself was the man to do it. The guns of Hegel's Dialectic must be not merely silenced, they must be taken and turned against the metaphysicians. There must be a Dialectic of Materialism.

The decision of Marx to storm the citadel of Hegelianism and erect in its place a Dialectic of Materialism was a decision of genius and a major event. According to Hegel, Dialectics had meant the collision and interplay of *ideas*, and the self-development of the Absolute Idea itself. It was a thesis that had provoked endless high debate, but the issue had been fought, as it appeared, in metaphysical cloudland. Its results, no doubt, had been exploited for practical purposes, but the conflict itself, as it actually engaged men's minds, was in the region of ideas, and its academic protagonists were content to have it remain there. Marx resolved to draw down the battle out of cloudland and fight it out in the dust of the social-political terrain. He began to insist that the real Dialectic—that is, Dialectic rightly set up, on its feet and not on its head—is not metaphysical at all, but physical and material. It is the interplay in Nature and History, not primarily of ideas but of unconscious forces which drive forward with the constancy and inevitability of natural law. Admittedly, in Man and History they invade the sphere of consciousness, but they are none the less physical for that. For the real drive of History is made not by leaders and heroes with their ambitions and dreams, nor by philosophers with their speculation; the driving forces are those whose dynamism is provided by Nature in the instinctual struggle for existence, for subsistence, for power. "The idea", he declares, "has always made itself ridiculous in so far as it has been detached from interest".

It is true, of course, that Marx was by no means the first to make war on metaphysics in the name of social reform or revolution. In France Auguste Comte was already doing so with his Positive Philosophy, and his teachings were being widely discussed. But Marx, with far greater dæmonic energy and a more penetrating insight into practical affairs, had planned a campaign incomparably more aggressive, more realistic, more ruthless, if not more ambitious, than anything Comte had dreamed of. Henceforth for Marx the war must be carried on not as an old-time field-battle or series of such battles; it must be carried on in the market-place, the factories, as a

fight to the death between Capital and Labour, the *bourgeoisie* and the proletariat. The true interpretation of History must be in terms of economics, and the Dialectic must be the Class War. And for the rest he is content to make use of the Feuerbachian-Comtian doctrine.

"Man", says Marx, "makes religion, religion does not make man" Religion is the "self-feeling" of man, and, "Man is for man the highest being". Moreover he is "not an abstract being, squatting somewhere outside the world" in philosophic contemplation; he is "the world of men, the State, society"; and he loses himself and has need to grope for himself only in so far as he is blind to this, and thus misses his social integration. We may feel that it is true that man squatting *inside* his world in society, and subjected to the prescribed process of "integration" in the State, may miss himself just as completely, as far as his real humanity is concerned, and become a mere gadget of the State machine. But this would be to assume that man, as to his higher nature, is not "just as determined, concrete" and mechanical an organism as he is physically, and such a proposition would be flatly contradictory of the Marxian theory.

Meanwhile Marx had left the University and, overcoming the opposition of the Westphalen family, had married "Jenny" and plunged into journalism as a means of livelihood. There was never any question of his devotion to his wife. Years later, when revisiting their home-town, and when adversity was pressing hard upon them, he wrote to her: "Almost every one I meet asks me for news of 'the prettiest girl in Treves'—for tidings of 'the queen of the ballroom'. It cannot but tickle a man to find that in the fancy of a whole township his wife is enshrined as a 'fairy princess'."<sup>1</sup> But neither was there any doubt that, first and last, the one preoccupation of his life was the translation of the Dialectic of Materialism into the Social Revolution. There was a brief adventure as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne, then a sojourn in Paris to study French Socialism on the spot, and then a flight to Brussels when Guizot took action against alien seditionists. In Paris, Marx had met Louis Blanc, Leroux, Ledru Rollin, Proudhon, and other

<sup>1</sup> Rühle, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

revolutionaries, and had disliked them; but in Paris also he had met a young German, Friedrich Engels, and what was to develop into a lifelong comradeship was begun.

Nothing finer exists in the annals of those early years of the Socialist crusade than the patient, constant, self-effacing devotion of this magnanimous Engels. He was by two years Marx's junior, and the son of a wealthy textile manufacturer of Bremen with cotton-spinning interests in Manchester. Engels's upbringing had been in the atmosphere of Calvinistic pietism, but, as with Marx, Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, the influence of the neo-Hegelians of the Left, and the ebullient liberalism of the *Young Germany* party, had filled his head with "the ideas of the century". Outwardly he remained a business-man, the travelling representative of his father's firm, but in head and heart he was a revolutionary.

Of the actual working of capitalistic enterprise, and of industrial conditions on the Continent and in Great Britain, Engels knew more than Marx, and his contact with the British Chartists had convinced him that the Revolution could not be long delayed. But not all this would have sufficed to establish a bond of enduring fellowship between the two men. Marx, it is true, made contacts with facility, for his was an aggressive personality, but he made and retained few friendships. For with him intellectual and ideological sympathy could as easily lead to a rupture as could flat contradiction and antagonism. Marx in fact could tolerate no rival, and a sympathizer who was his intellectual equal was always open to the suspicion of being a competitor for leadership. Moreover Marx's moods were capricious. "He called me", said Bakunin, "a sentimental idealist, and he was right: I called him gloomy, unreliable and vain, and I was right".

But this mastiff-like docile Engels brought to Marx from the first the simple steadfast fidelity of a dog for his master. Half a century later, when Marx was dead and Marxism had passed into history, Engels was urged by his friends to claim his rightful share of credit for the origin and development of Marxian Dialectics. He replied:

I cannot deny that both before and during my forty years' collaboration with Marx I had a certain independent share in

laying the formulations, and more particularly in elaborating the theory. But . . . what I contributed—at any rate with the exception of a few special studies—Marx could very well have done without me. What Marx accomplished I would not have achieved. Marx stood higher, saw farther, and took a wider and quicker view than all the rest of us. Marx was a genius; we others were at best talented.<sup>1</sup>

This was the spirit of Engels from the first. No coldness, no rebuff, no exaction of his imperious master, could ever discourage that fidelity or deflect it from its course. And now, in Paris, they came together and pledged themselves to the Revolution.

It is strange that the revolutions of 1848, when they came, took both men by surprise. The craters had been smoking and rumbling, but the sudden eruptions that set thrones toppling in France, Italy, Austria, Germany, found the two unprepared. The revolutions were, in fact, not *their* "Revolution" and owed little to their ideas. The uprisings in France, Italy and elsewhere were idealistic rather than materialistic, and were led, in the main, by men of the middle and upper classes whose interests were in politics rather than in economics. These revolutionaries of '48 believed in Progress, in Humanity, in Nationality, in Democracy, in Republicanism, but they had no enthusiasm for a "class war" or for "the dictatorship of the proletariat". In France the Socialism of Louis Blanc raised its head, but it was a head crammed with more or less pedantic ideas and inadequate to cope with the actualities of the crisis; and it was soon bowed in defeat.

It is, in truth, difficult not to sympathize with the politically-minded republican leaders of that period who saw revolutionary Socialism and Communism as a movement that, so far from helping the revolution, unconscionably and fatally hindered it. For, by forcing a division between "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat", the Socialists of that period were dividing the forces of liberalism precisely when their union was essential to success. The republicans could claim with sincerity that they, too, were the enemies of arbitrary privilege and artificial inequality, that they, too, were believers in "one sole

<sup>1</sup> F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, p. 52.

class, the People", but that a really radical and thorough Social Programme required first a period of popular education; and how could this be brought about so long as despotic monarchy, with its "black cabinets", its police and 'sbirri, controlled the press and the schools and denied the right of free speech and political association? The first necessity, therefore, was to overthrow despotism and put political power in the hands of the masses then the gradual economic emancipation of the people by means of legislative reform and their own co-operative effort must follow. On the other hand, and at the present stage, to raise the red flag of a purely Communist revolution was to alarm and alienate the middle classes and deliver the whole liberal movement over to the reactionaries. It was, in short, to sabotage the revolution.

This was the charge raised by Joseph Mazzini against Louis Blanc and the French Socialists after the fall of the Roman Republic of '49, and it had weight. Nor has it been without point in more recent times. For when, in a country without adequate political education, Lenin divided the forces of Russian liberalism in the name of the Marxist revolution, he did not succeed in establishing Communism, but he did succeed in driving Europe into the Fascist reaction.

But Marx certainly was in no mood to heed the protests of men whom he despised, or to collaborate in a revolution animated by that romanticism and idealism and "religious sentiment" which he abhorred. He had founded his Communist League and issued his reverberant Communist Manifesto, and now he hastened to Paris, where Louis Blanc was vainly attempting to get the Red Flag accepted as the national banner. But the Socialist experiment was already sowing discord, and Marx left for Cologne. In Cologne he found the German insurgents likewise divided, and when, irritated and frustrated, he returned to Paris, it was to learn that Louis Blanc and Ledru Rollin had already fled to England, and that he himself was under proscription. There was nothing to do but to follow them, and this he did.

Save for the unfailing help of Engels, he was now penniless. Jenny had three young children to care for and was expecting a fourth. She had sold her furniture and pawned her silver plate,



the last articles of value she possessed; and from London she wrote to a German friend of their plight.

I followed him once more across the sea. A month later our fourth child was born. You would need to know London, and the conditions there, to understand what that meant: three children and the birth of a fourth.

## 3

The iliad of that London exile, which was to last from 1850 to 1883 and end only with Marx's death, has often been recited: yet it is right that we should record something of it, if only to remind ourselves of the sore travail with which Marxism was given to the world. For a while Marx earned a pittance (£4 a week) for London letters contributed to the (*bourgeois*) *Tribune* of New York. The letters were written mainly by Engels, for Marx's English was uncertain; but he was soon complaining that "the infernal devils" of the *bourgeois* press would "print only what they pleased" and pay for only what they printed; and the income fell away. There were occasional periods of affluence, as when a generous uncle gave £160, and when the Baroness von Westphalen left Jenny a few hundred thalers. Then there would be a brave exodus out of miserable lodgings into better rooms, and an ambitious buying of secondhand furniture; but soon the money would go, the resort to the pawnshop would be resumed, and in the end the unfailing Engels would have to answer one more signal of distress.

"I am in debt", writes Marx to him in 1861, "to the landlord, also to the grocer, the baker, the newspaper man, the milkman, also to the tailor." Later, in 1863, he complains that "dribbles of help" are inadequate. "The grocer has refused me credit for three weeks past, and until I have paid the pig off I must buy of him for cash, if I do not want him to sue me"; and presently he is reporting that the brokers are in, that there is a summons from the butcher, that little Jenny (their daughter) is ill in bed, and that there is neither food nor fire in the house. Meanwhile there were other troubles. There was a split in the Communist League, there was the endless tittle-tattle and backbiting common to exile groups, there was even a

challenge from an irate colleague to a duel; and worse than all, there were what he calls "the idiotic chatterers" who made it their business to poison, or try to poison, the mind of Jenny with "the vapourings of the democratic cesspools".

For Marx himself, who spent his days in the British Museum in endless writing and research, and whose mind was pre-occupied with his immense project, the burden was bearable, but for Jenny, the "fairy princess" of Treves, brought up in surroundings of refinement and comfort, it was all but intolerable and wholly cruel. After her fourth confinement she wrote to a friend in Germany:

Let me describe one day of this life. . . . Since wet-nurses are exceedingly expensive here, I made up my mind, despite terrible pains in the breast and the back, to nurse the baby myself. But the poor little angel drank in so much sorrow with the milk that he was continually fretting . . . day and night . . . Of late there have been violent spasms, so that the child is continually betwixt life and death. When thus afflicted he sucked so vigorously that . . . often the blood streamed into his little mouth. One day I was sitting like that when our landlady suddenly appeared . . . and demanded the five pounds which we still owed her. Since we could not pay this sum instantly, two brokers came into the house and took possession of all my belongings—bedding, clothes, everything, even the baby's cradle and the little girl's toys. . . . Our friend Schramm hastened forthwith to seek help. He took a cab, the horse fell down; he jumped out, and was brought back into the house bleeding, the house where I was lamenting and the poor children were trembling.<sup>1</sup>

In 1852, when one of the daughters died, money for the coffin was borrowed from a French refugee. Three years later their nine-year-old son Edgar died, a boy of great promise. "Now for the first time", wrote Marx, "I know what real unhappiness is." Yet in the midst of their sorrows Jenny could write: "What really crushes me, what makes my heart bleed, is that my husband has to suffer so many petty annoyances". As for herself, she was able, as she said, to count herself among the lucky ones since her dear husband, the prop of her life, remained at her side.

<sup>1</sup> Ruhle, *op. cit.*, English ed., pp. 202, 203.

There was also, in truth, another prop. There was the faithful Lenchen, Jenny's personal maid in the Westphalen household, who had attended her young mistress when she was the "fairy princess", and who, undissuadable and indomitable, had followed her in all her wanderings and vicissitudes. Lenchen's devotion extended to Marx also, but she was perhaps the one person in the world for whom he had no terrors, and who could reduce him to docility.

But Marx was "difficult". Bakunin charged him with egregious personal vanity and implacability. "Marx", he declared, "will never forgive a slight to his person. You must worship him, make an idol of him, if he is to love you in return; you must at least fear him if he is to tolerate you." Another Russian associate of the early days has left a more photographic description which Ruhle has reproduced.

He has a thick crop of black hair, hairy hands, an overcoat buttoned awry, but he looks like one endowed with the right and power of demanding respect. His movements are awkward, yet bold and self-confident. His manners conflict sharply with the ordinary conventions of social life. He is proud, somewhat contemptuous, and his harsh voice with a metallic ring is admirably suited to his revolutionary opinion about men and things.

Carl Schurz, who became a United States senator, is a more reliable witness. Of Marx at the age of thirty he writes:

He was sturdily built, with a broad forehead, raven-black hair, a huge beard, and dark sparkling eyes, so that he attracted general attention. . . . What Marx said was (unquestionably) weighty, logical and clear. But never have I seen anyone whose manner was more insufferably arrogant. He would not give a moment's consideration to any opinion that differed from his own. He treated with open contempt everyone . . . who contradicted him. . . . I shall never forget the scornful tone in which he uttered the word "bourgeois" as if he were spewing it out of his mouth; and he stigmatized as "bourgeois" . . . everyone who ventured to contradict him

Upon Mazzini too (whom Marx dismissed as "that eternal old ass") he left the same impression of contemptuous arrogance.

<sup>1</sup> Ruhle, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

Mazzini found him "a man of acute but dissolvent genius, domineering in temper, jealous of the influence of others". And once, at a time of severe personal sorrow, even the long-suffering devotion of Engels was strained by a display of apparent callousness and superiority. Yet the strange man, whose domineering egotism was so repellent, was full of domestic affection and a benevolent "uncle" to the children of the neighbourhood, who knew that his pockets were full of "sweeties"

So the *iliad* continued until 1869, when, as Ruhle says, Engels with a hurrah said farewell to "sweet commerce", made a clean sweep of Marx's debts, settled upon him a handsome annuity, and became his near neighbour in London. But the tide of the years had cruelly marooned both men. They had had the mortification of seeing British Chartism turn away from their counsels and dissensions break up their own following. In France the Socialists refused to follow Marx, and even his two sons-in-law ("To the devil with them both!" he exclaims bitterly) had gone over to the opposing camp. In Germany it was no better, and *Das Kapital*, the labour of years, and the book which was designed to call a new world out of chaos, was neglected by a preoccupied public. In 1881 Jenny died of cancer; Marx, stricken and enfeebled, died two years later, tended to the last by the faithful Lenchen. Of the children, their daughter Jenny, who had married Charles Longuet, a Socialist leader in Paris, died in 1883; Eleanor, who lived in "free union" with Edward Aveling (the Dubedat of Shaw's *Doctors' Dilemma*), committed suicide; and, years later, Laura, who had married a Creole physician and lived in poverty, also committed suicide with her husband "to avoid the disagreeables of old age".

No doubt it is possible to argue that the intolerable strain of the London years, a strain which had left its mark upon the whole family, had no real justification. How far, it may be asked, is an able-bodied, able-minded man justified, even for the sake of a social revolution, in living a life of economic irresponsibility, and exposing his family, not for a month, a year, but for almost a lifetime, to privation, insult and humiliation? No doubt, even in *bourgeois* London, and if only he could have torn

himself away from the British Museum Library, Marx could have earned enough to meet the weekly bills of his butcher and grocer and milkman; and even so, the International might still have been founded and "that damned book", as he called his *Das Kapital*, given, ultimately, to the world. After all, did not Engels contrive to combine a reasonable attention to business with a fruitful and indeed immortal devotion to Socialist propaganda?

But such questions are idle. No man was ever more completely at the mercy of an idea than this man who nourished a supreme contempt for abstractions and whose passion it was to subordinate all ideas to economic realities. He lived in and for the apocalyptic vision of a Revolution that, at times, seemed about to rend the heavens and re-create the earth. He was ridden by his *daemon*, and all other considerations were as nothing.

## 4

What, then, was Marx's doctrine?

In the first place it must be noted that this is not identical with the question, What are the basic doctrines of Socialism? Schemes for a revolution in the economics of industry, for the creation of a new and harmonious social order, for the substitution of some form of collective ownership for private ownership, and of co-operation for competition—such schemes existed quite independently of Marxism. In this more general sense we may define Socialism as standing for "an economic system in which industry is carried on under social direction and for the benefit of society as a whole"; and in that sense the term "Socialism" has been traced back to the early thirties of the nineteenth century, when Marx was still a schoolboy.

Of Socialism of this general sort the first constituent principle was the substitution of collective property for private property in the main sources and instruments of production: and it followed that if society was to own these sources and instruments, it must control the processes of production and the distribution of the profits. Early Socialists like Saint-Simon and Robert Owen believed that, by organizing communistic settlements as

working models of the new order, they could demonstrate to the world the advantages of the system, and that the multiplication and federation of these communist cells would lead to the speedy conversion of peoples and governments.

Louis Blanc and his French associates founded *political* Socialism, in the sense that they sought to control the legislature by political means and to establish a nationalized, State-aided form of industry. Ferdinand Lassalle (like Marx, a German of Hebrew origin) advocated a similar policy in Germany. Joseph Mazzini, the Italian revolutionary, who began his political career in 1830, and who strenuously opposed Marxist communism, believed none the less that the reconstruction of society on the basis of Labour would be "the most beautiful revolution of all time". He believed it could be peacefully achieved, when once the people had won political power, through co-operative working-men's associations working under the encouragement of the State and gradually substituting profit-sharing industry for private enterprise.

But Marx's doctrine was distinctive; it was a rigid orthodoxy with, so to say, a damnatory clause for all rival orthodoxies and a strictly close communion. It was an ideology in the sense that it was not simply a revolutionary economic policy, but a theory of history, of civilization, of life. And it was entirely characteristic of his aggressiveness and dæmonic self-confidence that he should have formulated his programme in terms that deliberately challenged not only *bourgeois* economics but also every form of religious faith—every conception of life that did not happen to tally with his own militant materialism.

Marx's distinctive doctrines, then, fall into three main sections: (a) economic, (b) philosophical, and (c) ethical. In the first we have the doctrine of Surplus Value, in the second the Marxist interpretation of History, and in the third the theory of the Class Struggle.

(a)

First, then, the doctrine of *Surplus Value*. The term refers of course to commodities, and it suffices here to define "commodity" as anything that is sold in the market. In this sense,

obviously, Labour is itself a commodity; and it is a no less obvious fact that the prices of all commodities are subject to change. It had been the concern of pre-Marxian economists to investigate the conditions relating to this fluctuation and discover if possible the "law" underlying it. Fundamental to this inquiry was the question, How is the *value* of a commodity determined? The pre-Marxian answer was that it was determined by the labour necessary for its production. But if labour itself is something that is sold in the market—that is, a commodity—then that answer could not be satisfactory: for it said no more than that the value of a commodity is determined by the value of another commodity. If this other commodity—labour—is the determinant of all values, how is the value of labour itself determined? Unless that question could be answered the economist was faced with an unequated  $x$ .

It was possible, however, by a slight change in the terms of the original statement, to carry the answer further. It could be said that the value of a commodity is determined by the *cost* of producing it. The question then arose, What is the cost of producing labour? Economists found that this question translated itself into another: What is the cost of producing the labourer? And the answer was, that the cost equalled the sum of the means of maintenance of the labourer and his family. Here, it may seem, a bed-rock level was found at last—a fixed and permanent "value" for the measure of all other values. But it was not so, for this value was also variable. Ricardo's law of wages showed that, by reason of the competition of labourers for employment, the wage-rate tended to decline to bare subsistence-level. If at this level the labourer also declined and labour-power fell away, then the demand for labour would rise and labour-value would rise correspondingly, but only to fall again as the supply increased.

At this point Marx intervened. While accepting Ricardo's "iron law," he made a new approach that turned the flank of the so-called "classical" position. He argued that the magnitude of value of any commodity-article is determined by "the amount of labour socially necessary for its production under normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time", and that the unit of

this measurement was "*simple abstract human labour*", while "value" meant "exchange-value". We shall return to this formulation in a moment; but we must note here that Marx proceeded to argue that the labour-hours necessary to reimburse the employer for the labourer's wages were less, under the Capitalist system, than the number of hours actually worked. In other words, what was paid to the labourer was always less than the value of the work which the employer traded with as the *product* of labour. Thus the worker produced, by unpaid labour, a *surplus value*, which was taken over by the employer and turned into capital: so that capital came to represent this stored-up surplus.

Stated in these bare terms the implication would seem to be that manual labour is the sole producer of wealth, and that the value of direction, invention and brain-work generally, as also of the various degrees of skilled labour, is not taken into account. But in fact Marx was careful to seek a common denominator, which he called, as we have seen, "*simple abstract human labour*". He was obliged to do this, since it is obviously beside the mark to argue that the value of one commodity is to the value of another as the labour-time necessary to the production of the one is to that of the other. The labour-hours spent in filling sandbags cannot be put on the same value-level as the labour-hours spent in watch-making, nor can efficient and "intense" labour be put on the same level as inefficient and "slack" labour. Therefore Marx had recourse to such generalizing terms as "*simple abstract human labour*", "normal conditions" of production, and an "average degree" of "skill" and of "intensity". He was also obliged to modify his theory of value by recognizing the *utility* factor and by allowing only "socially necessary" labour to pass as a value-measure.

Here, if Marx, in common with all other serious economists, was baffled in his attempt to reduce this problem to simple concrete terms, and was forced into ambiguous generalizations, the reason is to be found in the inextricable tangle of facts and factors with which he had to deal. But it is certainly difficult to feel that he succeeded here in the task he had set himself: for in spite of himself he was driven into that region of almost metaphysical abstraction which he despised; and such terms as



"average skill", "average intensity", "social necessity", "simple abstract human labour" are as difficult to run to earth as the Hegelian Idea.

For how, we may ask, are all the various types and grades and degrees of skilled and unskilled, "intense" and "un-intense" labour to be reduced to "simple" labour? This "simple labour" is a mathematical abstraction, though the mathematical process by which it is reached is not clear. And what is meant by the amount of labour "socially necessary" for the production of any commodity? What is "socially necessary" and what is not, and how are they determined? And what is the *norm* by which "normal conditions" of production are to be estimated? What also is to be understood by "the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent" at any given time?

We may feel that these are extremely difficult questions to answer in definitive concrete terms—in terms, that is, which could provide Marx with that basic, unfluctuating unit of value which was necessary, and which the classical economists had failed to formulate. For it seems clear that when once such terms as "socially necessary" labour are introduced, we are obliged to inquire how this determinant is fixed. If what is socially necessary is fixed by reference to the *market*, then it means that the only labour recognized by Marx as a measure of value is that labour whose value has been fixed by the market-scale itself. In that case labour-value is not basic, and still remains in fact the unequated  $x$ ; and the theory of Surplus Value falls into ambiguity.

But however we feel about this, there can be no disputing the fact that Marx's theory attempted to give formal economic expression to something which itself could not successfully be denied, namely, that labour was being grievously exploited. That this could be expressed in other than economic terms, and with a passion that recalls the denunciations of those old Hebrew prophets in whom Marx no longer believed, the London of his day had good reason to know.

Behold this day the sins of the rich. How are the poor oppressed! How are the needy downtrodden! In many a place the average wage of men is far below their value to their masters. In this age there is many a great man who looks upon his fellows as

only stepping-stones to wealth. He builds a factory as he would make a cauldron. He is about to make a brew for his own wealth. "Pitch him in! He is only a poor clerk, he can live on a hundred a year. *Put him in!* There is a poor time-keeper: he has a large family: it does not matter. a man can be had for less; *in with him!* Here are the tens, the hundreds, and the thousands that must do the work. *Put them in,* heap the fire; boil the cauldron; stir them up; never mind their cries. The hire of the labourers kept back may go up to heaven; it does not matter, the millions of gold are safe. The law of demand and supply is with us. Who is he that would interfere? Who shall dare to prevent the grinding of the face of the poor? Cotton-lords and great masters ought to have power to do what they like with the people: ought they not?" . . . And yet the sempstress in her garret, and yet the tailor in his den, and yet the artisan in his crowded factory, and yet the servants who earn your wealth, who have to groan under your oppression, shall get the ear of God, and He will visit you.<sup>1</sup>

That these words, spoken to 24,000 people at the Crystal Palace in 1857, were not uttered by a Marxist, but by a Baptist preacher in a Christian discourse which owed nothing to Marxist doctrine, does not detract from their truth; but what Mr. Spurgeon was proclaiming with evangelical passion, Marx, with his theory of Surplus Value, was attempting to formulate in strictly scientific terms.

## (b)

By the *Economic Interpretation of History* we are to understand the Marxian doctrine that all changes in the legal, political, æsthetic and philosophical ideas of men are merely ideological phases of the one continuous economic struggle. Engels, in his preface to the new edition of the Communist Manifesto, 1888, expressed it thus:

In every historical epoch the prevailing modes of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch; consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggle.

<sup>1</sup> Fast Day sermon delivered at the Crystal Palace, October 7, 1857. *New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. iii, p. 384.

It follows that this "economic interpretation of history" is quite explicitly a secularist interpretation. No power of initiative is conceded to the forces of the spirit. These forces, so far as they are allowed any existence at all, are seen as subserving, and giving manifold ideological expression to, those instinctual drives for material subsistence and for power which have their source in the physical constitution of the world.

We may feel that this thesis, distinct and uncompromising as it was, could not have been in any sense fundamental for Socialism as such. Neither the idea nor the practice of State ownership or Communism is necessarily, and so to say arterially, conjoined to doctrinaire materialism. But it was fundamental to Marx's own personal ideology, and we have seen enough of the Marxian psychopathy to understand that he could not have given himself to a movement that was not stamped all over with his own image. Concerning this basic dogma of Marxism, then, one or two observations must be made.

In so far as it is true that man is an "economic animal" (a conception not to be confused with the obsolescent myth of "Economic Man"), it must be true that man's history admits of an economic interpretation. And, so long as the term "interpretation" is not made to mean complete exhaustive *explanation*, this is also recognizably true of those aspects of human history which have no immediate connection with economics. The history of Philosophy, for example, may be shown to bear an economic interpretation. For no philosophic movement has ever developed in a vacuum; on the contrary, it has always been related to the existing conditions of human society.

And this is equally true of Religion. The political and economic changes which took place in ancient Greece profoundly affected the forms assumed by the existing State religion, and also by the cultist movements (such as Orphism) that developed contemporaneously outside the pale of the establishment. And it is no less true that the advent of Christianity as a world religion was materially dependent upon those political and economic conditions which made a world religion both possible and desirable. Again, Engels had every right to point out that the Renaissance was essentially a *towns* movement, and in

that sense related to the *bourgeoisie*: and it is just as certain that continental Protestantism and the English Reformation were closely bound up with the political and economic conditions of the period.

But Marx intended something much more radical than this. His economic interpretations were in fact economic *explanations*; so that Art, Philosophy and Religion and all movements of the spirit were seen as the reflection of the all-inclusive economic struggle. It goes without saying, therefore, that between doctrinaire Marxism and any form of Christianity the conflict here was inexorable, since to believe that religion is the product of economics is to deny the Faith.

But the Marxist dogma was not less a denial of *Philosophy* and *Art* also: for if all movements of thought are determined by material forces, then the activities of the human mind from Plato to Marx himself are but the capers of dolls in a puppet show. Under the domination of an ideology informed with this dogma, the Economic State must claim a natural dictatorship over pure Science and knowledge of any sort. *Science, Art and Learning* can have no other function than to yield such dividends of material interest and power as shall serve the governing economic purpose, or, in other words, the purpose of the Economic State—this although Marx himself was no State-worshipper.

And it is not less fatal to *ethical values*: for if these are produced, changed, or suspended by the all-determining economic movement in its irresistible drive through history, then they have no authority but that of the material interests which they exist to serve. It follows that there is no Right or Wrong other than that which the economic order ordains, and whatever course of conduct or policy serves the material interests of that order is unassailable. This is, in short, materialistic antinomianism.

Finally, this Marxist dogma works out into a denial of *Man*. For if it is affirmed, as Marx does affirm, that "the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life", and that man's ideas, beliefs and volitions are in this way expressly decided and shaped by material forces, then, by that affirmation, the words "Man" and "Humanity" are evacuated of their moral content. Man is seen as an automaton; it is almost

as if he were made for economics, not economics for him—as if the sons of men fulfilled their function and destiny only as they became the creatures of the economic order.

It must be repeated, therefore, that by committing his movement to *doctrinaire* secularism Marx deliberately limited his appeal to those whose general bias and temper were materialistic, and that, as deliberately, he antagonized the rest. Particularly he excluded in advance any possible following that he might otherwise have recruited from within the Churches. Thus in *Das Kapital* he illustrates his doctrine of value with a coarse and wanton gibe at the sanctities of the Christian religion. As a use-value, Marx argues, the material of a linen coat is something different from the coat, but as value it is the same as the coat. “The fact that it is value is made manifest by its equality with the coat, *just as the sheep’s nature of a Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God.*”<sup>1</sup> (Italics not in the original.)

(c)

Thirdly, we have the doctrine of *the Class War*. In the Communist Manifesto of 1847 Marx maintained that “the history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles.” Modern society, built upon the ruins of feudalism, has by no means (he was able to show) minimized this conflict; it has intensified it. For modern capitalism tends to centralize the means of production, concentrating ownership in the hands of the powerful few; until it has come to pass that the modern State is “nothing more than a committee for the administration of the consolidated affairs of the *bourgeois* class”. Faced, therefore, with this situation, and “forced to sell themselves as a commodity, like any other article of commerce”, the workers inevitably take sides against their masters; and thus it becomes increasingly clear to them that Capitalism is their one enemy.

Marx believed that this antagonism was bound to increase not only in bitterness but also in violence; for public law, and the restraints of conventional morality and religion, would

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, Capitalist Production, English trans. by Moore and Aveling, 1908 edn., p. 20.

become, for the exploited and desperate proletariat, only so many *bourgeois* fictions or prejudices, organized in the *bourgeois* interest. Then the last phase of the struggle would be reached, in which the proletarians, recognizing that they had "nothing to lose but their chains", and reinforced by the weaker and disaffected elements of the capitalist class itself, would forcibly overthrow the existing order. Once and for all, as Engels put it, they would emancipate society at large "from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions, and class struggles". This, in brief, was the Class War theory.

It has frequently been observed that in describing the opposing forces Marx falls into ambiguity, but this is not a criticism that need detain us. The Manifesto, it is true, describes the proletarians as "the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live"; and he goes on to describe them as being "without property" and as living a domestic life that has "no longer anything in common with the *bourgeois* family relation"—a description which, so far as British workers were concerned, could apply only to the very lowest grade.

This criticism may be true enough, but it is clear, not only that Marx intended to include the better-paid skilled technicians, and in the end (as we have seen) the smaller fry of the master class themselves, and the "salaried", but also that he himself was not here concerned about a strict definition. His "theory of pauperization" shows that what governed his thinking on this point was the conviction that, under capitalism, the condition of the workers of *all* grades must steadily deteriorate, so that the property-less state of the lowest ranks of labour must sooner or later extend to all and reduce them to a common level of destitution. According to the Manifesto, "the modern worker, instead of rising with the advance of industry, sinks deeper and deeper. . . . The worker becomes a pauper and pauperism develops even more quickly than population or wealth".

Here it seems as if Marx miscalculated, and the comment of Philip Snowden in his *Socialism and Syndicalism* (p. 76), written before his Ministerial days, is adequate:

The experience of the seventy years since that statement was made has proved that it was not an adequate forecast of the working-class movement. Marx fell into the error of believing that the condition of the workers would get worse and worse because he did not anticipate that the organized power of the working-classes would be used more to secure palliative reforms than to seize political power for the purpose of overthrowing the capitalist system.

Marx did not anticipate it, nor did he desire it. What he desired and vehemently believed in was the Class War itself, a war in which the pauperized proletariat should be goaded by hatred and desperation to make a violent end of the *bourgeois* order. And war, though it may give licence to all the distortions of propaganda, puts a stop to all palliations.

Perhaps it is also true, as Mr. Stuart Chase pointed out years ago, that Marx's miscalculation went deeper. By "freezing the notion of the class struggle into an absolute", after the pattern of the Hegelian Dialectic, and as if it were the only struggle of any social consequence, Marx lost touch with history. In 1937, eighty years after Marx's Manifesto, Mr. Chase was recording that the bitter struggles raging along the whole economic front in the United States were quite as much struggles between rival industries as between Labour and Capital: railroads *versus* highway trucks, oil *versus* coal, banks *versus* manufacturers, the American Federation of Labour *versus* the Committee for Industrial Organization, and white labour *versus* coloured labour. "Indeed, for really bad blood, the struggle between Marxists who support Stalin and those who support Trotsky outstrips them all"<sup>1</sup>.

Be this as it may, what is clear is that in this doctrine, as in his materialistic Dialectic, Marx's teaching was in flat opposition to the spirit of the Christian Faith. But in fact the Class War dogma, rejected as it was by the main body of British Socialists, was the negation of democracy also—of democracy at least in so far as the principled democratic method is that of discussion and negotiation, in which criticism and even opposition have a constructive function. And here again Philip Snowden's comment represents the British reaction:

<sup>1</sup> See *Harper's Monthly*, December, 1937.

They [British Socialists] deny that the desired end—the making of the means of production collective property—can be attained by the ruthless and relentless prosecution of the class war. Such a struggle cannot develop among either of the parties to it that social spirit which is the prime essential for a Socialist community. The preaching of the doctrine of the class war keeps alive and excites that very spirit of sectionalism and hatred which prevents men from realizing that in the highest sense the interest of each is the interest of all. Socialism will come only when the great body of men and women have intellectually become convinced that they can promote their own welfare only by promoting the common welfare <sup>1</sup>

All the same, it must be recognized that this fundamental Marxist doctrine of the Class War had a potency peculiar to itself: for by means of this doctrine Marxism was able to make direct appeal to that passion of combativeness, of hatred, which, given a seemingly rational sanction, can work, together with a sense of injustice and injury, to generate in the hearts of men a dynamism of tremendous effectiveness, at least for destruction. It remains true, however, that the notion that, by the complete overthrow of the existing order and the substitution of another (the Marxist) order, society could be “once for all” emancipated from “all exploitation, oppression and class distinction”, reveals a naïveté very far removed from the moral realism of Christianity, and from any political sense that has maintained its contacts with human nature.

For no Hegelian metaphysical abstraction could be more abstract than the idea of the Marxist Communist Order, or any other Order, unless that idea is interpreted in terms of those referents that bring it down to human actuality. “Society” remains in cloudland unless we mean by it, not only the political and economic *theories* which it represents, but also the people actually in control of its machinery and the people who are controlled by it. And, so long as human nature remains what it is, no system on earth can be in itself a guarantee against that development of privilege which leads to class distinction and that abuse of power which leads to exploitation and oppression.

This is not to paraphrase the glib aphorism of Pope and say

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.



that the form of any particular government is of no consequence and that a good administration is all that matters; it is to say that, in the sager words of an older writer, there is something which the law cannot do, and that there is no real substitute for those empowerments of the spirit which make for ethical control. And for the rest, the record of the Marxist experiment, which has now passed into history with the first phases of the Russian Revolution, supplies its own comment.

But long before this, in Marx's own day, his inexorable antagonist, Mazzini, was attacking this materialistic ideology. "You can elevate men", he warned the Communists, "only by elevating *man*—by raising our conception of life itself"; but instead they had planned a "model republic of bees or beavers", and invited the human race to frame itself therein. For in fact, he continued, materialistic Communism could at best only exchange one tyranny for another, an exchange for which the fiction of the Communist order as the embodiment of the "general will" would be no adequate consolation. "The best among Communists reply, 'You must devote yourselves'. Devote yourselves to whom? Do you not impose the sacrifice of liberty upon all? And if not upon all, have you then a caste of masters—of directors—and a caste of labourers?" And if so, what of the promised abolition of class distinctions? But the idea of "devotedness" was, he added, "a sort of fatality" for all such schools; it reappeared, inevitable, indispensable, but meaningless so long as a materialistic philosophy "denied the sentiment of the Infinite" and reduced human society to a colony of ants.

There was another Marxist doctrine which, if not distinctive, was emphatic—the doctrine of Internationalism, expressed in 1864 in the constitution of the famous "Red" International. Here again Marx and Mazzini clashed. For Mazzini internationalism meant the recognition of the principle of nationality as finding its justification and fulfilment in the idea of Humanity. For Marx it meant the opposite. It meant the repudiation of nationality and patriotism as belonging to an effete *bourgeois* ideology. With Marat he declared that "the workers have no country", and nationalism was for him a spent force.

Here again the verdict of history has been unfavourable. In dismissing the national principle as obsolescent, Marx made a profound miscalculation of the future course of European history and indeed of world history, and Mazzini was nearer political reality when he argued that revolutionary strategy demanded, not the attempted destruction of the national idea, but its elevation into organic relationship with the idea of Humanity.

Finally, history has made its comment upon Marx's theory that the Communist revolution is reached as the climax of the long economic process of industrialization and capitalist competition. For the country that in fact staged the drama of the Revolution was of all the countries of Europe the least industrialized and the least affected by capitalism.

It remains true that for good or ill—and surely for both—the name of Karl Marx has been written indelibly into the annals of Socialism and the history of the last hundred years. Had *Das Kapital* never been written British Socialism, which owes little to the Marxian theory, would still, perhaps, have pressed forward with its own constructive programme, and the British Labour movement would still have achieved its resounding victories; but the Marxist apostolate did give to the masses of all countries the powerful inspiration of a complete ideological system, a system, moreover, which had at least the appearance of scientific finality and oracular authority. *Das Kapital* became a Bible, which, even if it was not read by the masses of the faithful, could nevertheless be held in reverence, sworn upon, and cited for infallible proof-texts.

And it became the Bible of an army. For Marx, with his ruthless arrogance, his contempt for all opposition, his prodigious energy and self-confidence, did become a symbol of a great proletarian revolt, and a revolt, moreover, that was no longer the blind onrush of a mob but the drilled and organized movement of an army scientifically equipped and boldly led. And by achieving all this, Marx certainly, and Marx supremely, succeeded in breaking down the massive inertia and the armoured self-complacency of an industrial age that was only too willing to believe that its social and economic problems

could safely be left to those laws of supply and demand and of free competition which, it seemed, a wise Providence had ordained.

But here, for us in these studies, the significance of Marxism must be stated rather differently. We see that the movement which had begun so hopefully with Bacon and Descartes had now taken a turn as disquieting as it was unforeseen. What had begun as the exaltation of the Kingdom of Man and of human reason had now passed into a strange phase. Comte had carried the anthropocentric tendency of scientific positivism and rationalism to its logical end in the worship of Humanity. Man had become the centre of his own universe and the object of his own devotion. And now, through the very triumphs of applied science which the new *organum* of knowledge had made possible, civilization had developed a new industrialized order. In this new order man's inhumanity to man had found new expression, and the age-old division of rich and poor, advantaged and disadvantaged, had generated new and intolerable antagonisms and discontents. Thus, in a society so conditioned, Marx had found it possible to exalt the Kingdom of Man only by denying to man the reality of his own spiritual dignity. And floating up from the past of the eighteenth century came echoes of the voice of Rousseau: *Better and more virtuous the life of the simple savage than the life of civilized man! Happier and less depraved the unreflecting existence lived in subjection to Nature than the proud life that commands her in the name of Science!*

But while Marx was still in London, and eleven years after the famous Communist Manifesto of 1848, another treatise, of a very different sort and authorship, was given to the world. Its theme was not Revolution but Evolution, but its effect upon Renaissance humanism, and much else, was revolutionary enough.

## T. H. HUXLEY

## I

IN 1859, when an eager public bought up the complete edition of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* on the day of publication, the honour of reviewing the book in the *London Times* fell to a young man named Thomas Henry Huxley. Two years earlier he had been appointed Fullerian Professor of Comparative Anatomy at the Royal Institution. His monograph on *The Family of the Medusæ* (jelly-fish), written when he was "a poor devil of an assistant-surgeon" in H.M.S. *Rattlesnake*, had already earned him the Gold Medal of the Royal Society; but with the review of the *Origin of Species* his career took a new and eventful turn. "I long to hear what Huxley thinks", Darwin had written "If I can convert Huxley I shall be content." Huxley was unmistakably and soundly converted, and Darwin declared, "I can now sing, *Nunc dimittis*." The following year came the historic meeting of the British Association at Oxford, when Huxley leapt into the arena, and into fuller fame, as the protagonist of the Darwinian theory. The story, now worn threadbare, hardly bears re-telling, but it shall be told.

At the Association Sir Richard Owen, full of years and honours, had come down heavily against Darwin, and Owen's authority as an anatomist and palæontologist was, at that time, supreme. On the floor of the Association young Huxley had the temerity to contradict the oracle on a question of fact, and had promised to "justify the unusual procedure elsewhere"; which he did. (The question had turned on the cerebral development of the gorilla.) But more was to follow. Bishop Wilberforce—not, it is thought, without priming from Owen—intervened in the later discussion with a speech marked by that facile and slightly saponaceous eloquence for which he was distinguished, and he concluded with a singularly ill-inspired and unmannerly

quip. What, he inquired, were the facts about Mr. Huxley's belief in his descent from the ape? Was it on his *grandmother's* or his *grandfather's* side that the ape-ancestry had come in? The assembly called Huxley to his feet, and the now historic retort was delivered.

You say that development drives out the Creator, but you assert that God made you; and yet you know that you yourself were originally a little piece of matter no bigger than the end of this gold pencil-case. . . I asserted, and I repeat, that a man has no reason to be ashamed of having an ape for his grandfather. If there were an ancestor whom I should feel shame in recalling, it would rather be a man—a man of restless and versatile intellect—who, not content with an equivocal success in his own sphere of activity, plunges into scientific questions with which he has no acquaintance, only to obscure them with an aimless rhetoric, and distract the attention of his hearers from the real point at issue by eloquent digressions and skilled appeals to religious prejudice.

The outcome of the general dispute was Huxley's book, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, published five years later, and a continuous flow of educational, literary and controversial activity, which ceased only with his death in 1895.

What actually had been the controversy provoked by the *Origin of Species*? The idea of Evolution was not new. Anaximander, centuries before Christ, had taught that living creatures arose through the action of the sun's heat upon the moisture of the earth, and that, as evaporation went on, certain marine creatures, including the ancestors of man, adapted their form and structure to changed conditions and developed into land-animals. In modern times Leibnitz, Buffon, Lamarck and Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had expounded, in one form or another, the evolutionary theory. We have observed in these chapters how Rousseau had himself painted the picture of man's ascent from a sub-human state of nature. Thus Rousseau:

Important as it may be, in order to judge rightly of the natural state of man, to consider him from his origin, and to examine him, as it were, in the embryo of his species, I shall not follow his organization through its successive developments, nor shall

I stay to inquire what his animal system must have been at the beginning, in order to become at length what it actually is. I shall not ask whether his long nails were at first, as Aristotle supposes, only crooked talons, whether his whole body, like that of a bear, was not covered with hair, or whether the fact that he walked upon all fours, with his looks directed toward the earth, confined to a horizon of a few paces, did not at once point out the nature and limits of his ideas <sup>1</sup>

It cannot be supposed, therefore, that, in Darwin's time, the notion of man's being evolved from lower orders of being was something so new and undreamed of as to shock the public, or a section of it, by its sheer novelty. What the *Origin of Species* actually did was to bring the notion out of the region of philosophic speculation into definitive scientific form as an induction from observed facts. And the definitive form which it assumed was the theory that species were not immutable but had originated through the process of what Darwin termed "natural selection", in the course of the age-long struggle for survival. It was, in fact, evolution by accident — through chance variations.

This, obviously, was something very different from the vague philosophic speculations of earlier times, and created a new situation. For the position of Science in the modern world was such that if the Darwinian theory passed from the stage of hypothesis to that of a generally recognized scientific doctrine, then that traditional view of the world which had supported the culture of Christendom would have to be radically changed. And of course Darwin was aware of this. To publish his conclusion was, as he said to his friend Hooker, "like confessing to a murder".

What had been "murdered"? *Special creation*—that entire traditional conception of the natural world which had pictured it as "made", part added to part, by the "Great Artificer", and which, therefore, had pictured the successive emergence of fish and fowl and beasts and man at the fiat of the Creator. And if the gravity of the "confession" for orthodox religious belief was not at all in Darwin's mind (save as it affected the equanimity of his female relatives), it was certainly in the minds

<sup>1</sup> *Origin of Inequality* (Everyman's Library translation by G. D. H. Cole).

of the custodians of orthodoxy. For this new doctrine seemed as fatal to Victorian evangelicalism, and to every form of traditional Christian belief, as the New Learning had seemed to the Medieval Church. and if we need an illustration of the alarm and disturbance that followed, we have it in the pages of Edmund Gosse's memoir, *Father and Son*

Of the senior Gosse, a zoologist of distinction and a member of an evangelical body known as the Brethren, the son writes:

With great and ever greater distinctness his investigations had shown him that in all departments of organic nature there are visible the evidences of slow modification of forms, of the type developed by the pressure and practice of æons. . . . Where was his place, then, as a sincere and accurate observer? Manifestly, it was with the pioneers of the new truth, it was with Darwin, Wallace and Hooker . . . Here was the dilemma! Geology certainly *seemed* to be true, but the Bible, which was God's Word, *was* true. If the Bible said that all things in Heaven and Earth were created in six days, created in six days they were.

For the seriousness of the Darwinian theory as a menace to traditional Biblicism was heightened by the fact that it had been preceded by the geological theories of Sir Charles Lyell, which had pushed back the age of the earth far beyond the supposed limits of Scripture chronology.

The senior Gosse, thus threatened with inward schism as between his science and his Biblical creed, fought back. Lyell had argued that geology revealed a gradual modification of the earth's crust and that the study of fossil remains established the theory of a slow development of organic forms. Gosse, standing by his literal interpretation of Genesis, maintained on the contrary that creation had been, not gradual, but "catastrophic". The fact was (argued Gosse) that, at the Divine fiat, the world had stood forth *with every structural appearance of maturity*, fossils and all. For it must have been with the world as it was with Adam himself. Adam came into existence, not as a baby, but as a full-grown man, with all the natural marks of human development, including the *omphalos*, though no umbilical cord had ever attached him to a mother. If, then, Adam wore an *omphalos*, why should not the structure of a new-created world have borne fossil traces of an infancy through

which it had never passed? . . . But not even the faithful were edified by this ingenious defence, and Gosse's friend, Charles Kingsley, wrote that he "could not give up the painful and slow conclusion of twenty-five years' study of geology, and believe that God has written on the rocks one enormous and superfluous lie".

But the grotesque and pathetic absurdity of Gosse's counter-theory indicates something of the stress of mind which must first have unbalanced his critical judgment. And in fact it did appear that supreme values were in jeopardy. For if the Mosaic cosmogony were abandoned, what about the Biblical doctrine of God, Nature and Man, and the Christian revelation as a whole? This question could not be avoided, and the exponents of the new science were in no mood to parley. Darwin, it is true, had concluded his *Origin of Species* on a note that may have been intended to convey some reassurance.

From the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, follows. There is grandeur in this view of life with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, while this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

But Huxley was less accommodating. The absurdities of Gosse, the almost malicious obstinacy of Owen, the poor gibes of Wilberforce, the disingenuous subtleties of others, had roused him. He saw the clergy as the deadly enemies of science and confessed himself "mildly episcopaphagous". We have his own outlook in a letter written to his wife in 1873.

We are in the midst of a gigantic movement, greater than that which preceded and produced the Reformation, and really only the continuation of that movement. But there is nothing new in the ideas which lie at the bottom, nor is any reconciliation possible between free thought and traditional authority. . . . I have no more doubt that free thought will win in the long-run than I have that I sit here writing to you, or that this free thought will organize itself into a coherent system, embracing human life and the world as one harmonious whole.



This confession, characteristically clear and confident, leaves us in no doubt as to what he saw. He saw the Darwinian controversy as part of that movement of learning and science and of free inquiry which had "produced," as it had preceded, the Reformation, and was now moving with increased momentum toward greater achievements; he saw that the conflict between this movement and traditional authority was irreconcilable; and that, in the end, Free Thought, overcoming all opposition, would systematize itself into one great unity, bringing order and harmony to the world. It would be, so to say, the New Catholicism

But if this gigantic movement of Free Thought was the continuation of the movement that had "produced" the Reformation and (as something gigantically greater) was now "producing" the Darwinian theory and the science of Evolution, then of course the real significance of the Reformation was that it was a liberative activity of the mind of Man, and that it opened the way for further achievements of Science and Free Thought. Justification by Faith was significant only as a preparation for Evolution through Natural Selection.

The notion of the Reformation as a confessional movement that protested its faith in God and the immediate operation of His Spirit, in Christ and His redeeming revelation of Divine grace, in the human soul and its deathless destiny in the eternal world—such a notion was at most merely incidental. For Huxley the real importance of the movement was that it was a continuation of that self-assertion of Man, and that faith in human progress, and that repudiation of traditional authority, which had characterized the Renaissance. He himself coined and popularized the word "agnostic" to denote his own attitude of non-subscription to any faith beyond the confirmations of science, and he planned to carry the new crusade to the people.

It was in accordance with this project that he designed a series of lectures to working-men, not only on Evolution and other scientific subjects but on religion, theology and the Bible. His own views on these subjects, as on all others about which he cared to express himself, were admirably clear. He had a great respect for what he was pleased to call "the Nazarenism of

Jesus", but confessed that the only religion that appealed to him was prophetic Judaism. "Add to it something from the best Stoics, and something from Spinoza, and something from Goethe, and there is a religion for men."<sup>1</sup> From this recipe, it appears, the New Testament and even the "Nazarenism of Jesus" were omitted altogether.

## 2

The situation was piquant. Huxley had justifiably resented the amateur excursions of ecclesiastics like Wilberforce into the region of scientific questions with which they had no expert acquaintance; but his own excursions into Biblical criticism and kindred subjects were cheerfully undertaken as a public duty. And who could say him nay? Had he not the right of a free Englishman to express his views on any subject he pleased? What was "restless versatility" in Wilberforce and a presumptuous breaking of the bounds of his own sphere of activity, was in Huxley a necessary service rendered to the cause of Progress and Free Thought; and if the Bishops did not like it they could lump it. Manifestly, the "religion for men" (the Hebrew Prophets *cum* the best Stoics *cum* Spinoza *cum* Goethe) could not be withheld from the masses at the bidding of the obscurantists.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which, in spite of his admirable courage and honesty, Huxley did put himself in an equivocal position for he could now hardly help employing the authority which was rightly his own in the sphere of positive science to accredit his amateur judgments in a sphere to which positive science did not extend. For even within the sphere of science itself, as Elmer More has argued, there is a broad distinction to be observed between positive science as such and a scientific philosophy. Positive science has to do with the inductive classification of observed facts and sequences and their expression in terms of mathematical formulæ or of "law", and for this work, and those highly specialized intelligences who perform it, the public mind has long cherished an admiration touched with reverence. But it is easy to pass from the sphere of positive science to that of a hypothetical theorizing and philoso-

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Romanes, see *Life*, ii, p. 339.

phizing upon the implications of scientific facts; and here the authority of science is not nearly so decisive

But also, when the scientist thus dons the philosopher's gown, it is easy for the indiscriminating popular mind to accord to his philosophizings something of the same unquestioning docility which he evokes in his more priestly office of positive investigation. Nevertheless Huxley, pronouncing upon the cell-layers of the jelly-fish, could speak with an authority which he could not properly claim for his opinions about the significance of the Reformation, the future of Free Thought, or the precise ingredients of a "religion for men".

It was, however, in this region of philosophical inference, and not in that of scientific fact, that Darwinism most deeply engaged the religious mind. The disturbance and alarm created by the scientific challenge to the Special Creation theory was certainly serious for all who were pledged to a literal interpretation of Genesis, but this challenge was not without perceptible advantages for religion

For, after all, the old argument from design, based upon the special creation theory, proved too much. It was embarrassing to have to think that the venom-sac of the snake, the tentacles of the octopus, the curve of the vulture's beak and the tiger's claws, had been expressly designed by the God of the Christian revelation for the purposes which they served. The evolutionary hypothesis, by removing these structural characteristics from the region of creative design to that of development and adaptation under the pressure of the struggle for existence, eased the problem, even though it did not remove it. For, granted the unfathomable mystery of evil, and granted also that the taint of it was in the world before man (to which even the Genesis record points), the spectacle of Nature red in tooth and claw could more easily be understood in terms of evolution than as the direct design of the Creator.

But what the Christian Faith had always recognized was the fundamental distinction between Nature and Man: and, up to Darwin's time, this distinction had been taken for granted. Man, though fashioned, as to his body, out of the dust, was made in the Divine image and quickened by the Divine Spirit so that, though frail as a reed, he was, in Pascal's phrase, a "thinking

reed " and greater than his world. He was at once in Nature and above it, living his inner life under the sovereignty of moral imperatives and inspirations that Nature could not know. Bacon had not questioned it, nor had Descartes; Kant had affirmed it; but with Darwin the distinction was obliterated. Man was a product of natural evolution and was completely comprehended within the natural order. Even Carlyle, by no means a champion of orthodoxy, rebelled at this and flung a brickbat at the Darwinians. "I have no patience", he declared, "with these gorilla damnifications of humanity"

But Huxley's own conversion to this new doctrine had not been either difficult, or in any sense reluctant, nor does it seem to have been delayed by any prolonged discussion of its metaphysical implications. Why should it have been? Huxley's attitude to metaphysical, transcendent reality was one of agnosticism. So far as human progress was concerned, it seemed to be enough that mankind should live by the light of science and organize their lives within the natural scheme. Science and a scientific philosophy held, it appeared, the secrets of the new age. That there should be other minds that hesitated to respond with anything like so eager and confident an acceptance of this new gospel seemed deplorable; indeed it seemed to him indicative of a condition that was pathological, if not thoroughly dishonest. Was there any chance, he inquired, of educating the white corpuscles of the human race to destroy the theological bacteria bred in parsons?

For, at this stage, it was difficult for Huxley to believe that the reluctance of the Church to accept the new doctrine could be due to anything other than blind prejudice and perversity. How, for example, could it be due to a concern for Man himself and for human values and the future of human society? To men of the Huxleyan type it seemed so clear that Man's future was assured if only the guidance of scientific rationalism were unflinchingly followed. Given mankind's natural equipment and the unhindered progress of science, all that was needed to make the brave new world a reality was that Free Thought should "organize itself into a coherent system embracing human life and the world as a harmonious whole". In short, the one way to overcome all misgivings about Man and human

values and the future of society was to become an out-and-out Darwinian evolutionist. Nevertheless it was exactly here that Huxley, though not less convinced, became less convincing.

For it became clear to the serious-minded that the new gospel created problems of its own. For, obviously, the tendency of this new Evolutionism was to "naturalize" morals. If ethical man was a product of Nature, then it was reasonable to infer that his ethics were rooted in Natural Law. What was the character of this Law? To this Darwinism returned a ready answer. The first and great commandment of Nature was, *Thou shalt struggle for thy life*, with the corollary, *the fittest shall survive*. And certainly this fitness of the "fittest" had nothing to do with any recognizable standards of morality. It did not mean that the fittest were such because they were the noblest, nor yet the most courageous; it did not necessarily mean even that they were the strongest. The oyster and the spider had survived the sabre-toothed tiger. The rule was the rule of unrestricted competition, the prize was for the top competitors, and whether they won by courage or by cunning, by ruthless aggression or by armoured defence, mattered not at all.

A rough system, certainly, but there it was. And it was always possible to argue that it had justified itself by results. Somehow it had "evened out" and produced the tolerable and hopeful world of the nineteenth century. Nor were there apologists wanting who could apply the moral. If free competition was the law of Nature, how natural that it should be the law of trade! If the struggle for survival was the rule of life, how inevitable that it should be the rule of nations and empires! It inflicted hardships, certainly, but it "evened out", and there was no point in flying in the face of Nature.

We have no need to look farther than the ethics of Kant to see the issue here. For Kant, morality was rooted in the Categorical Imperative, the imperative that demanded that man should treat his fellows not as means but as ends, and that his every act should be attuned to the highest good of all. But what sanction for this could be found in Nature? And then there was another side to this "naturalization" of morals. Admittedly, in the relatively brief period of civilization, man had set up artificial conventions of his own and established traditional moralities

of various types, but what were these in comparison with the laws of Nature and the majestic evolutionary process?

It was inevitable therefore that the ancient Greek distinction between social convention and Natural Law, between artificial human embroideries and the real nature of things, should come into new prominence. But with a difference. For with the Greeks Nature embodied the eternal sovereignty of justice and righteousness, now it represented those vital instinctual impulses which took no account of ethical distinctions at all.

We have an apt illustration of this, as Professor Seth long ago pointed out,<sup>1</sup> in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where we find the phantasmagoria of poor Tess's moral world displayed over against the unreflecting vitalities and actualities of Nature

Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits in a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of guilt intruding into the haunts of innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism, she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly.

And so far as poor Tess was immediately concerned one would not admire the stony moralism that remained impervious to the poignancy of that scene. But neither can one admire the sentimentalism that remains blind to the implications that lie behind it, or the scientific "realism" that accepts them easily and as a matter of course. For the inescapable implication is, that Tess and her natural environment blended into one another. Tess was as complete a product of the evolutionary process as the birds in the hedges, the pheasants on the bough, the rabbits that frisked in the moonlight, and all that raised her above their grade was a matter of cerebral and nervous development. The real law for her, as for them, was the law of Nature, the law of the hedgerow and the rabbit warren; and compared with this the human moralities were artificial and, in her case, cruel and unjust.

And so of course within limits they always may be, if by

<sup>1</sup> A. Seth (Pringle-Pattison, *Man's Place in the Cosmos*), 1897. Essay on Huxley.

human moralities we mean social conventions and nothing more. It is a recognition, or the denial, of the *something more* and something other—the imperatives of the spirit which command the spiritual nature in man—that makes all the difference. It was the closing of the gap between Man and Nature, the grading of Man as a purely natural product of physical evolution, which raised this problem; so that the good Renan, passing a meditative old age in the fading afterglow of the Catholic faith, could wonder whether his lifelong chastity had not, after all, been a mistake. "Nature cares not at all whether man is chaste or not", and "I cannot rid myself of the idea that, after all, it is perhaps the libertine who is right." Matthew Arnold might protest that though Nature cared nothing, human nature cared a great deal; but what was the point of the protest if human nature was simply a product of the natural evolutionary process? Yet in the long run the cruelty of a traditional and Pharisaic moralism is mild compared with the cruelty that blends man into the natural scene and denies him a higher law than the law of Nature.

And, to repeat, the question had much wider correlations. It involved that whole temper and attitude and code of conduct which we comprehend under the term Humanitarianism. Young Mr. H. G. Wells, one of Huxley's enthusiastic disciples, felt constrained to announce (in his brilliant book *Anticipations*)<sup>1</sup> that the age of liberal and democratic humanitarianism was over, and that the future was one of inevitable international strife in which the top nation would be the nation most rigorously, ruthlessly and scientifically organized (by a top class of scientists and managers) for the mechanical destruction of its rivals. And the importance of the announcement lay not so much in its accurate anticipation of the Totalitarian State, but in the fact that it was presented, at that time, as something scientifically final, something to which, if one had a realistic scientific mind, one had not simply to submit, but to respond with serious and strenuous and hopeful resolution. And why not? If one were scientifically agnostic about all the transcendent realities, and scientifically alive to the inexorable imperatives of Natural Law and the Cosmic Process, the struggle

<sup>1</sup> See *Interpreters of Man*, Lutterworth Press, 1943.

for life and the survival of the fittest, what else was to be done? Whence should one draw one's sanctions for any moral protest? Natural Evolution called the tune, and what did Nature care about liberty, democracy or humanitarianism?

It was precisely in this region of scientific philosophizing, as distinct from positive science, that the crucial problem lay. The crass obstinacy, stupidity and obscurantism of the literal Biblicists was exasperating to men like Huxley, who, if they had lost their religious faith, had not lost their native candour and intellectual rectitude; but also the light-hearted way in which some of these new apostles of science could dispose of beliefs beyond their calculus was not less exasperating to men of religious mind. "If a man asks me", declared Huxley, "what the politics of the inhabitants of the moon are . . . I reply that I do not know; that neither I nor anyone else has any means of knowing; and . . . under these circumstances I decline to trouble myself about the subject"; and it was easy to pass to the inference that metaphysical questions about the existence of God and the spiritual nature of man were on a par with the politics of the moon. Nothing, it seemed, could impede the progress of Scientific Man in his vast enterprise of constructing such a world as should vindicate the great organic impulses of natural evolution. "I believe", Huxley declared to his Y.M.C.A. audience in his lecture on Descartes, "that we shall, sooner or later, arrive at a mechanical equivalent of consciousness, just as we have arrived at a mechanical equivalent of heat."

As surely as every future grows out of past and present, so will the physiology of the future gradually extend the realm of matter and law until it is co-extensive with knowledge, with feeling, and with action. The consciousness of this great truth weighs like a nightmare, I believe, upon many of the best minds of these days. They watch what they conceive to be the progress of materialism, in such fear and powerless anger as a savage feels when, during an eclipse, the great shadow creeps over the face of the sun.<sup>1</sup>

But, so far as Huxley was concerned, there was to be a surprising sequel. Amiel had anticipated it when, in 1877, he wrote in his Journal: "The growing triumph of Darwinism—

<sup>1</sup> *Lay Sermons*, 1891, p. 123.



that is to say of materialism, of force—threatens the conception of justice. But justice will have its turn. The higher human law cannot be the offspring of animality.”

## 3

In 1893, in his Romanes Lecture, Huxley re-stated the case for Nature, Man and Ethics, and at the end it was clear that for him, at any rate, the gap between Nature and Man had reopened. We have called it a surprising sequel, and surprising it was to his own public and to some, at least, of his colleagues; yet it was in no sense a recantation. His Darwinian conclusions remained without flaw or fracture, but another conclusion had been added, and this through the sheer compulsion of an ethical conscience that had revolted against the final implications of naturalism. The Categorical Imperative had asserted itself.

For the argument of the lecture is that there is a spirit in man and that that spirit is other than the blind energy of Nature. There is that in man which bids him withhold his allegiance to the natural order when that order traverses the imperatives of the moral realm. There is that in him which bids him oppose his conscience to the Cosmic Process itself and challenge its authority in the name of an authority still higher—in the name of the sovereignty of Right.

For is there or is there not, demands Huxley, a sanction for morality in the ways of the Cosmos? Is the Stoic rule, “Follow nature”, a rule to be followed? Is it a rule to be followed, that is, if it is taken to refer to the natural order and not to that higher nature which has its witness in the mind of man? Is human society ethically rooted in the underlying nature of things, or is it at odds with it? For answer, Huxley draws a contrast between ethical man and the world he lives in, between man’s moral sensibility and the moral indifference of Nature, between man’s sense of justice and Nature’s “unfathomable injustice”.

Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of man have come about; but in itself it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before.

And not only is cosmic Nature no school for virtue, it is "the headquarters of the enemy of ethical nature", so that "we must understand once for all" that "the ethical progress of society depends not on vindicating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it".

Nothing could have been clearer or more forthright or more honest. He had certainly not taken the line of those disingenuous upholders of Christian orthodoxy who had turned a blind eye to the facts of scientific discovery; instead the lecture had been an effort, as he himself phrased it, "to put the Christian doctrine that Satan is the god of this world upon a scientific foundation". With something of the moral passion of those old Hebrew Prophets whom he revered, something even of the conviction of St. Paul, he had contrasted the efforts of ethical man toward a moral end with "the deep-seated organic impulses which impel the natural man to follow his non-moral course".

Huxley, in fact, recoiled at the contemplation of a possible scientific civilization which, conforming to the blind drive of Nature, should lose its humanity, its human sense of justice and of mercy, and seek "progress" through a non-moral revolution and in an order ruled by the struggle for survival and for power. In such an order, in which the powerful would grow more powerful, the rich richer, the poor poorer, what would become of human values?

. . . if it is true that the increase of knowledge, the winning of a greater dominion over Nature which is its consequence, and the wealth which follows on that dominion, are to make no difference in the extent and the intensity of want, with its concomitant physical and moral degradation, among the masses of the people, I should hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away. . . What profits it to the human Prometheus that he has stolen the fire of heaven to be his servant, and that the spirits of the earth and the air obey him, if the vulture of pauperism is eternally to tear his own vitals and keep him on the brink of destruction?<sup>1</sup>

So clear and honest a mind as Huxley's, however, could not have been blind to the weakness of the position that he had now

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1, p. 42.

so courageously taken up. For if the fundamental postulates of religion—God, the reality of the eternal world, and man's immortal destiny—were to be treated as unknowable, like the politics of the moon, by what right could even the most important section of the fauna of our infinitesimal planet presume to sit in judgment upon the ethics of the Cosmic Process or criticize the very oracles of Nature and the laws of evolution? By what logic could man, evolved like all else from cosmic protoplasm, presume to exalt his own moral consciousness thus to arraign the heavens and the earth? The only sanctions that could save such an attitude and such a course from the certification of madness would be the sanctions of religion.

Unless the conscience of man is understood to witness to a righteousness whose source is not in himself or in the physical universe, he can hardly have any warrant which sanity can recognize as valid for announcing "once for all" that the Cosmic Process must be combated. That Huxley should have argued elsewhere that "the moral sense is a very complex affair", that it is "dependent in part upon associations of pleasure and pain, approbation and disapprobation, formed by education in early youth, but in part also on an innate sense of moral beauty and ugliness (how originated need not be discussed)"—that he should have so argued certainly did not relieve the difficulty. Why should the origin of this mysterious "innate" moral sense not "need to be discussed", if such stupendous claims to such amazing prerogatives were to be made in its name? The sense of moral beauty, of responsibility, of ethical values, which, without collapsing into laughter at its own pretensions, could set itself at its own charges to combat the very Cosmic Process itself—this sense, innate or otherwise, might be thought to deserve at least as much discussion as the hydrozoa dredged from the ocean floor. The moral sentiments are quite as truly facts as the cell-layers of the *Medusæ*, and their origin presupposes a cause commensurate with the effect. Least of all was the embarrassment likely to be relieved by the reflection that "we shall, sooner or later, arrive at a mechanical equivalent of consciousness, just as we have arrived at a mechanical equivalent of heat".

It is right to add that, fifty years after that famous and noble Romanes Lecture, the theme was resumed, by a happy choice, in a lecture in the same series by Huxley's distinguished grandson, Dr. Julian Huxley. Apart from his scientific writings, Dr. Huxley has become so friendly and familiar an oracle to many millions of Radio listeners that to note his own Romanes Lecture at all critically seems almost an act of ingratitude: and certainly to those who still found T. H. Huxley's ethical reactions to Darwinian implications alarming or disagreeable, his grandson's pronouncements must have been reassuring.

For Dr Julian Huxley was able to indicate that now, after a further half-century of scientific investigation, the apparent difficulty about evolution and ethics can be overcome. "*Our ethics can be classified, like our backbone, among our supporting mechanisms. . . . Its peculiarity is that it charges all that passes through its mill with the special emotive qualities of rightness and wrongness.*"<sup>1</sup> "Ethics, like backbones, come out of non-existence into existence *de novo*." Nothing could be simpler. Moreover, the pedigree of Conscience—thanks, we may presume, to the investigations of Professor Freud—is now, in this later Romanes Lecture, revealed with equal clarity. For the origin, it appears, is plain. "The absoluteness of moral obligation turns out on analysis to be no true absolute, but a result of the nature of our infantile mental machinery, combined with later rationalization and wish-fulfilment."

It is, in brief, on this wise. The newborn infant is first conscious of his mother, or of the one who acts in her place. He is dependent upon her and emotionally attached to her, deriving from her both sustenance and physical pleasure. On the other hand, he is brought into conflict with her when her will crosses his own. And the result is—conscience. Nothing could be simpler. "*Without a mother, no strong love focused on a personal object; without such love no conflict of irreconcilable impulse; without such conflict no guilt; and without guilt no effective moral sense.*"<sup>1</sup> Thus we have at last discovered to us the sources of that Conscience which, in the view of the lecturer's distinguished grandfather, was competent to criticize the ways of the Cosmos.

<sup>1</sup> The italics are not Dr. Huxley's.

It is true that lingering questions may persist. "*Without a mother no strong love*"; but why the "love" even *with* her? "*Without conflict no guilt*"; but why "guilt" even *with* the conflict? "*Without guilt no effective moral sense*"; but how could there be "guilt" in the first place if there was not an "effective moral sense" to effect it? We may feel that we are presented with the logic of Alice's Wonderland if we are told that it is guilt that produces moral sense, and not moral sense guilt; and certainly we shall not be able to dispel the suspicion that once more we are dealing, not with positive scientific fact, but with unprovable inferential theory: how inferential and unprovable we shall see in our examination of the Freudian system.

And the sample "case of conscience", by means of which the lecturer illustrates the workings of this newest form of casuistry, will hardly reassure us. (The italics that follow are not Dr. Huxley's.)

Was Gauguin morally right in leaving his wife and family to devote himself to painting? There is always a price to be paid, both by oneself and by others, for bringing a talent to fruition. We must face that fact. But who is to decide if it is a just price? . . . Personally, I *would feel* that wherever there is a genuine and informal *sense of vocation*, this will be a sufficient ethical sanction [for forsaking one's wife and family for one's art].

It appears that it is all a matter of *feeling*. Dr. Huxley "would feel" that a course of conduct is ethical if he were satisfied that the subject so acts because he has a genuine and informed "sense" (feeling) of "vocation"—a "feeling", in other words, that he has been "called" to act as he does act.

But is the guidance we obtain here from Dr. Huxley's hypothetical "feeling" scientifically satisfying, even when it confirms, or is confirmed by, the "feeling" of the subject? And what, in this relation, is a "genuine" feeling as distinct from one that is not genuine; and how are we to recognize it? Possibly it is a matter of depth and intensity. But whence the "vocation" or "call"? Presumably it is an inner call and is again a matter of "feeling". Yet it is an authoritative voice, "inly heard"—so authoritative that, under certain conditions,

it can justify a man's leaving his wife and family and cleaving to his art. Whence this compelling authority?

But then, thanks to the scientific progress of the last half-century, there is no longer any mystery about it: we may call it conscience, but it is all part of the phenomena of ethics and can be classified, like our backbones, among our "supporting mechanisms". It functions like a mill, and its (unexplained) "peculiarity" is that it charges all that passes through it with "the special emotive qualities of rightness and wrongness". If Dr. Huxley's mill gives him a certain "feeling" of rightness in relation to the ethical product of Gauguin's mill, the result is a happy agreement between their supporting mechanisms. And so what? And so, in the "sounding labour house vast" of the physical universe, the Cosmic Process grinds mechanically on, as before, and there is nothing to be done about it.

It is at this point, perhaps, that the scepticism of faith rescues reason from the credulity, not indeed of science, but of scientific philosophers. For whatever the opinions just cited may be, they have hardly the authority of positive science; and we may feel that nothing comes nearer to credulity than the naïve belief, tricked out in scientific terms, that the whole world of man's ethical nature, with its eternal vistas, its towering distinctions between the evil and the good, is merely the phantasmagoria induced by the secretions or capsuled properties of some sort of "supporting mechanism", like the liver or the suprarenal glands. There seems to be no very clear and compelling reason why one should surrender to any such theory of Man and of reality as this. As for Darwinism, the explanation of the origin of species through natural selection, chance variations, and the survival of the fittest no longer prospers, and evolution itself no longer serves as an all-in explanation of the universe. It is the whole that "contains" evolution, not evolution the whole: and this leaves room for teleology and the mystery of Spirit. The Darwinian controversy belongs to the past.

IN his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*<sup>1</sup> Freud has a passage in which he comments upon the alleged fact that "all the malevolence in humanity" had been called forth to oppose the movement of which he was the leader. And he goes on to say that this vehemence of opposition need not be a matter for astonishment; nor need it be supposed that it was caused by the reluctance of the public mind to accept novel theories whose supporting evidence was relatively inaccessible. The antagonism, says Freud, had a deeper source.

Humanity has, in the course of time, had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages upon its naïve self-love. The first was when it realized that our earth was not the centre of the universe, but only a tiny speck in a world-system of a magnitude hardly conceivable. . . . The second was when biological research robbed man of his peculiar privilege of being specially created, and relegated him to a descent from the animal world, implying an ineradicable animal nature in him. . . . But man's craving for grandiosity is now suffering the third and most bitter blow from present-day psychological research, which is endeavouring to prove to the "ego" of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind. . . . This is the kernel of the universal revolt against our science.

A movement that has so profoundly affected the modern conception of Man certainly cannot be denied a place in our studies.

Sigmund Freud, who was of Jewish parentage, was born in Freiburg, Moravia, in 1856, and died in London, September 24, 1939. Nearly the whole of his life was spent in Vienna. After devoting some years to physiological studies, he qualified as doctor of medicine at the age of twenty-five and became a clinical neurologist. Those were the days when "mesmerism" was passing into respectability under its scientific name of hypnotism, and it happened that in 1884, when Freud was

<sup>1</sup> English translation, George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

twenty-eight, another Viennese physician, Dr. Breuer, told Freud of a case of hysteria in which hypnosis had been successfully used. The patient, when hypnotized, had been able to give a clear account of the circumstances and emotions that had caused the hysteria, and the disclosure had led to a cure. Freud decided to investigate hysteria psychologically, and the following year he studied in Paris under the great neurologist, Charcot, whose experiments in hypnotism were already celebrated. In 1893 Freud persuaded Breuer to publish the case mentioned, and the two collaborated in a book, *Studies in Hysteria*—Freud himself having already published works on neuropathology.

The collaboration with Breuer soon ceased, but within a few years, and in spite of the general disapproval of medical colleagues, Freud had won to his side such investigators as Adler, Brill, Farencki, Jung, and Ernest Jones. Not all of these remained Freudians, but Psycho-analysis was now by way of being recognized as a method of treatment in cases of nervous disorder, and by 1908, when Freud was fifty-two, the movement had so far advanced as to hold its first International Congress. Eighteen years later, on his seventieth birthday, Freud, as the founder and pioneer of Psycho-analysis, was honoured with the freedom of the city of Vienna and with tributes from *savants* and learned societies from all parts of the world. When the outbreak of Nazi anti-Semitism forced him to seek refuge in England, he was an old man, and his work was done.

2

What, then, is Psycho-analysis as a movement and as interpreted by Freud? First, it is a method of medical treatment in certain cases of neurosis; and second, it is a theory, broadly speaking, of human nature and of life. It is with Freudian *theory* that we have to do, and particularly with the Freudian conception of Man; but method and theory are so closely related that neither can be examined apart from the other.

It is right to say that, so far as the theoretical and doctrinal side of Freudianism is concerned, Freud himself was very far from desiring to elaborate any "philosophy" whatsoever.



He was in fact as scornful as Marx of any sort of metaphysical speculation. But even hostility to metaphysics implies conceptions or preconceptions of a philosophical kind; and when Freud passed from the consulting-room to the lecture-platform and expounded his views about man, civilization and life, his expositions obviously overpassed the limits of mere methodology. His more or less philosophical inferences and adumbrations may have grown out of his clinical methods, or, again, his clinical theories may have been developed on the basis of certain philosophical preconceptions; in any case his expositions were by no means confined within the limits of positive science; they were affected and informed by a certain *weltanschauung*, by a view of the world and of life and of the nature of reality.

There are, then, two pronouncements of Freud's which we may take as texts for the first part of our inquiry: "*The psycho-analytic method was based upon the discovery by Joseph Breuer that the symptoms of disease in certain nervous patients have meaning*"; "*The doctrine of repression is the foundation stone on which the whole structure of psycho-analysis rests*". First, Psycho-analysis began with the discovery that *symptoms have meaning*.

We may take for example the case of a neurotic woman patient who makes a daily practice of walking hurriedly into a particular room, standing at a particular spot beside the table, ringing for her maid, and then, after some trivial and quite unnecessary conversation, dismissing her. Why does she do this? She herself, when questioned, can give no reasonable explanation, and this makes the practice a "symptom". The business of the psycho-analyst is to discover its meaning.

Let us suppose that by means of hypnotism he brings up from the repressed memory of the patient an extremely unhappy incident which happened some years earlier. Let us further suppose that this incident, through a complication of circumstances that need not be related here, had to do with a red ink stain deliberately made in order to catch the eye of the serving maid of that earlier time. And finally, let us suppose that the patient's peace of mind at that time depended upon her being able to assure herself that the maid did actually notice the stain, but that this assurance was never achieved.

Now the psycho-analyst examines the room to which the

patient so regularly, and apparently unnecessarily, summons her present maid, and he finds a fairly conspicuous red ink stain on the table at which the lady habitually takes her stand and before which the servant also stands. The "meaning" of the symptom is now made clear. By summoning her maid to that particular room, and by, so to say, manœuvring her into a position from which the ink stain must be plainly visible, the patient is unconsciously trying to satisfy herself that the earlier stain must also have been observed by the former maid.

The psycho-analyst has now the key, not only to the particular nervous symptom, but also to the neurosis itself; for it is evident that this repressed incident is somehow, as the saying goes, "preying upon" the patient's mind. When she herself is made to see it—to see the real cause behind that impulse to ring for the maid in that room—that particular symptom will cease; but also the nervous malady itself can be radically dealt with. This, certainly, may seem an unlikely illustration, but the case may be read in Freud's *Introductory Lectures*, though the discovery that explained the symptom was not in fact obtained by means of hypnotism. That symptoms have meaning is, then, the basic postulate, and the psycho-analytic method is directed to the discovery of their genetic cause.

Second comes the statement that the doctrine of repression is the foundation-stone of the whole structural system of Psycho-analysis. Let us see what this means. Before Freud, the attention of psychologists had been focused upon the contents of consciousness, but the experiments of Charcot, Breuer and others had disclosed a new field. Hypnotism had revealed that memories which were not retained in the conscious mind, and which had thus completely disappeared, could be recovered. Clinical observation had also revealed that these vanished or buried memories could powerfully influence the conscious mind from their hiding-place. It was these forgotten things that could cause nervous and mental disorders.

"Where", then, was the hiding-place of these forgotten things (and naturally the "where" in this question has no spatial reference)? Freud's answer was, In the Unconscious. "Mental processes", he says, "are essentially unconscious . . . those which are conscious are merely isolated acts." And here,

so far as Freudian terminology is concerned, we must distinguish between the "Unconscious" and the "pre-conscious" (or "sub-conscious"). Our field of consciousness at any particular moment is very limited. A clock may be ticking in the room without our being aware of it. It is audible, but it is not in our "field". Pythagoras correctly observed that the constant metallic clangour of a metal foundry was not heard by men who worked in the midst of it. We can think, as we say, of only one thing at a time, and the rest is temporarily "faded out". But these other things are not dismissed to the Unconscious; they remain on the threshold of consciousness in the "pre-conscious", and can be called up at will. In the "Unconscious" are the things which can *not* be called up at will.

It may be noted incidentally that some approaches to the conception of the Unconscious were made in ancient times. For example, the psychology of Plato's Socrates looks in that direction. Imagine, says Socrates,

the figure of a multifarious and many-headed beast, girt round with heads of animals, tame and wild, which it can grow out of itself and transform at will. . . . Now add two other forms, a lion and a man. The many-headed beast is to be the largest by far, and the lion next to it in size. Then join them in such a way that the three somehow grow together into one. Lastly, mould the outside into the likeness of . . . the man, so that, to eyes that cannot see inside the outward sheath, the whole may look like a single creature, a human being.<sup>1</sup>

By the figure of the lion we may understand the bodily appetites, by the figure of the man, the rational soul; but in the figure of the monster with many heads "which it can grow out of itself and transform at will", and which is mysteriously connected with the other two, we have something very suggestive of the Freudian *Id* which operates from the Unconscious. Again, Augustine explicitly states that man has a conscious will and another will of which he is not conscious. But, to repeat, in the Unconscious are the things which we can *not* call up at will. Why cannot this be done? This is a question which brings us to the Freudian theory of Repression.

<sup>1</sup> Plato's *Republic*, lx. 588, Cornford's translation, Clarendon Press, 1941, p. 309.

When some particular content of the conscious memory produces in us an emotional experience that is painful, shameful, alarming, or otherwise embarrassing, and so creates a state of tension, our "strategic personality" has to dispose of it. It may do so in one of two ways: it may provide the emotion with some outlet, and so "work 'if off"; or, failing this, it may endeavour to forget the whole business—to thrust it completely out of mind. If the attempt succeeds, this is Repression. And here again the Freudian terminology must be noted.

"Repression" is more than "suppression". The act of suppression is a very ordinary exercise in our daily life. The mind of the schoolboy may wander from his examination-paper to the innings he played in the last cricket match, but he suppresses the recollection and turns to the set questions. The reader in the reading-room may want to smoke, but he suppresses the notion of it and continues his reading. In the course of a normal day the average man suppresses an untold number of thoughts, recollections and impulses: he is bound to do so, otherwise his life would be completely chaotic. But this is not Repression. The things I suppress I may revert to at will, but the things I "repress" (in the Freudian sense) are sent down into the Unconscious, and a "censorship", established on the threshold of consciousness, forbids their return. If they attempt to defy the "censor" (that is, the forces of repression) and climb up, there is a "struggle on the stairs", a conflict on the threshold. Thus the patient who had the painful and distressing experience somehow associated with the ink-stain could not remember the experience, but was nevertheless suffering from the disturbance which it had set up on the edge of her conscious life.

It should be added that we must not understand Freud to mean that this act of repression is consciously and deliberately performed; on the contrary he sees it as the work of the "defensive mechanism" of the mind—the mechanism which "saves the personality from the over-excitement and from the disorganization connected with the open appearance of the conflict". On the other hand, as we have already seen, Freud would not have us suppose that when the repression has been accomplished the thing repressed ceases to function. If that

were really so, there would be no point in Psycho-analysis at all. Actually, the thing repressed remains "affective"—it *affects* the conscious mind and produces the symptoms present in neurosis. In other words, the "unconscious" is not static but dynamic.

Here, then, are the two postulates that form the foundation of the Freudian method and theory: (1) the existence of the "unconscious" and its dynamic influence upon the conscious mind; and (2) the existence of "repressions" and the psychic conflict which they set up. And it will be noted that both these discoveries were clinical—were made in connection with Freud's direct observation of patients afflicted with nervous disorders, and with his general study of neuropathology. But a movement that began as a method of treatment in cases of nervous and mental disease naturally developed a general working theory to explain the *rationale* of the method, and then passed on to a theory of human nature itself, or what we may call a doctrine of Man; and the clinical method, the pathological theory, and the anthropological doctrine, having grown up together, seem to be inextricably interwoven. But at present our concern is with the method and theory.

Let us recapitulate. Every time, says Freud, that, in the study of a case of neurosis, a *symptom* is encountered, it may be concluded that "definite unconscious activities which contain the meaning of the symptom" are present. But more: the symptom is formed, in fact, *as a substitute for that something else* which remains submerged; and the "something else" is the repressed thing, be it a thing of horror, or shame, or fright, or whatever else. The unexplained effort of the repressed thing to pass the "censor of the threshold" (of which more later) and break into consciousness produces in the patient's mind a certain anxiety and conflict, but he is unaware of the real cause of it. When he is made aware of it, he experiences a "catharsis" a purging away of the elements of disturbance, and the symptom disappears.

But Freud found that hypnotism was not a satisfactory method for the obtaining of this result. For one thing, not all patients could be hypnotized; and for another, hypnosis, while widening the area of consciousness, obscured the *conflict*

between the unconscious repressed thing and the defensive forces that engaged to keep it repressed; and, by obscuring this conflict, it made the identification of the particular repression difficult. For in the hypnotic state the "censorship" is to a certain extent relaxed (though not by any means, be it noted, to the extent that the hypnotized person loses his normal moral sense); and to that extent the conflict is removed.

Freud, therefore, with Jung and other collaborators, developed that method of "free association" treatment which later became part of the psycho-analytical technique. Briefly, it was the method of suggesting to the patient certain "stimulus words" and persuading him to name on the instant the ideas or associations which they happened to suggest. For the success of this experiment confidential relations had, of course, to be established between patient and analyst and the barriers of normal reserve broken down; but by means of this new method, patiently followed, not only was the desired "widening of consciousness", formerly obtained by hypnosis, secured, but also the resistance of the opposing forces in the patient's mind was sooner or later brought out. The problem of so overcoming defensive resistances as to make the unconscious accessible to consciousness was in this way solved, and the psycho-analyst was able to track down a repression.

### 3

The next development of the Freudian method relates to the interpretation of dreams: and as this leads directly to the whole theoretical and terminological *corpus* of Freudianism, we may as well set down here the meaning of certain terms peculiar to Psycho-analysis in general and to the Vienna school in particular.

**Ambivalence.**—Opposite ways of behaviour conditioned by one and the same instinctual urge.

**Catharsis (Cathartic Method).**—The process of purging away the effects of a dammed-up emotion (or mental energy) by exposing the hidden cause of the obstruction and the consequent stress.

**Cathexis.**—The retention (damming up) of mental energy in a particular channel. Thus "libidinal cathexis" occurs when

- the normal flow of sexual emotion toward some particular object is pent up and ceases.
- Censor.—The sum of repressive forces on the threshold of consciousness.
- Complex.—A circle "of thought and interest of strong affective value" (Freud). "A group of emotionally tinged ideas partially or entirely repressed" (Jones). A "polite euphemism for a bee in one's bonnet" (Oxford Dictionary).
- Displacement.—The transference of an *affect* (desire, disposition, passion) from one idea (image or object) to another. An attempt by the mind to disguise or otherwise hide an unconscious "meaning".
- Ego.—The "I", mainly conscious, but partly unconscious.
- Id.—The unconscious, impersonal, non-rational and non-moral totality of instinctual forces; the reservoir of all repressed urges. *Not* the unconscious mind itself.
- Libido.—The "energy . . . of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word 'love'" (Freud).
- Oedipus Complex.—Complex produced by a son's excessive attachment to his mother, and leading to (repressed) jealousy of his father. (The Electra complex is its feminine counterpart—the daughter's attachment for her father and jealousy of her mother.)
- Repressions.—Memories or urges rejected by the conscious mind and thrust into the unconscious.
- Super-ego.—The ideal "I" with whom the individual imaginatively identifies himself.
- Trauma.—A state of emotional and mental conflict.
- Unconscious.—The dynamic centre and reservoir of the lower and primitive elements of human nature, and of all repressions.

We come, then, to the Freudian treatment of Dreams. In ancient times, as we know, the importance of dreams was generally recognized. Alexander the Great had his dream interpreters who acted as his advisers, and so had the Egyptian Pharaohs (see Genesis 37). Even Descartes, as we have seen, regarded certain of his dreams as "signs". Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and seer, seems to have been the first to elaborate a theory of dreams as a symbolical dramatization of the dreamer's state of mind—a dramatization in which, according to Swedenborg, the same

action may have two or three levels of significance. Freud became convinced that in cases of neurosis this symbolical dramatization was of high importance for psycho-analysis. Every dream, as he points out, is a "mental occurrence"; and, even though the dreamer is in normal health, it must be regarded as a neurotic symptom.

Freud's theory admits of simple statement. Sleep is a condition in which the sleeper withdraws his interest from the outside world. As Tennyson has it:

To Sleep I give my powers away,  
My will is bondsman to the dark<sup>1</sup>—

to the dark which shuts away all visible external things. But as Koheleth says, "a dream cometh with a multitude of business"—introduces, in fact, into the sleeping state something of the business of the outside world from which the sleeper has withdrawn himself: and, so regarded, the dream is an intrusion.

There is, however, more to be said. The activity of dreaming may be occasioned by sense-stimuli, such as the flashing of a light upon the sleeper's eyes, the sound of thunder, or the scent of flowers; or it may be occasioned by some thought or anxiety which will not let the sleeper's mind rest in peace; but the *general* "purpose" of the dream itself is to guard, as far as possible, the sleeper's rest by associating any disturbing stimulus with some suppressed *wish* of the sleeper and dramatizing its fulfilment. When a dream takes the form of a "nightmare" it has, of course, failed in this function: but in any case, to quote Adler, "dreams always contain signs of vital problems which the dreamer never recognizes in his waking life"—they indicate in one form or another the dreamer's secret wishes or fears.

It follows that there is in all dreams a *manifest* content and a *latent* content. The manifest content is supplied by the visual images and the action, the latent content refers to the wish or purpose which they symbolize or mask. If an illustration is needed for what is so obvious, we have it in the dream of the harvest-field which Joseph related to his brethren.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *In Memoriam*, iv.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 37: 7, R.V.



Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves came round about and made obeisance to my sheaf.

Here the *manifest* content is made up of the visual images and action of harvesting—a content furnished by the dreamer's memory; the *latent* content symbolized Joseph's secret pre-sentiment of, or desire for, pre-eminence over his brothers; and as such it was understood by them. Obviously it is the *latent* content of the patient's dream which engages the psychoanalyst; for if he can find it out, he has a clue to the secret genetic impulses at work in his patient's mind. The questions, How much of the detail of a dream is normally remembered? and, What are the chances of the memory's being undistorted by the waking mind? cannot, of course, be overlooked: but what is evident is that the successful interpretation of dreams depends upon an accurate understanding of the symbolical significance of their imagery.

For, according to the Freudian theory, a repressed wish can get past the "censorship" and dramatize itself only in so far as it is successfully disguised; and Freud claims that the wish thus disguised may be further concealed. Instead of taking the leading part in the drama it may take only an inconspicuous place in the *ensemble*, or in the "stage-scenery", and this although it represents in fact the dominant interest. Thus a child's dream of hunting a man-eating tiger might represent to the Freudian analyst a naïvely obvious dramatization of the child's repressed wish to kill his father; but, on the other hand, in a dream of very different character the same wish might be subtly hidden in some quite subordinate and inconspicuous symbolic detail. That the classification of conventional dream-symbols—water, caves, boats, houses, rooms, ladders; riding, flying, swimming, travelling by train—that this classification has been worked out with some particularity, usually with reference to the sexual interest, is now well known; and the fact need not surprise us that, to the uninitiated layman, the interpretations can occasionally seem as marvellous and esoteric as the priestly deciphering of hieroglyphic records must have seemed to the unlettered Egyptian peasant.

What here principally concerns us, however, is the nature of

that "Unconscious" whose "affective" activity lies behind man's dreaming and waking mind.

## 4

It would be incorrect to say that, for Freud, the dynamism of the Unconscious was wholly sexual, but it is true that he soon came to see the sexual interest as dominant. In general, the Unconscious is the power-house of the instinctual forces, and all mental phenomena, according to Freud, have their dynamic origin in these forces. It must also be noted that here the term "force" or "energy" has a strictly physical reference. The force or energy that is the motive-power of a mental process is certainly of a special kind, so far as its manifestations are concerned, but otherwise it operates under the general laws of physics, and, at least in principle, all discharges of mental energy are measurable. The instincts, in short, are biological in their function, belonging to the body and not the mind; but their "voltage" discharges into the mind and produces representative mental images, while these mental images, in turn, form the *personæ* and "properties" for mental "plays" of a sort that promises instinctual satisfaction. These plays may be severely cut and censored or wholly suppressed by the mind, but no amount of suppression or repression will destroy the instinct itself or stop it from functioning: operating outside the mind, it will continue to infiltrate into the mental sphere and produce new "representations" there.

This is something like St. Paul's "law in the members" that "wars against" the law of the mind, and like that outlaw "mind" that is "not subject" to the higher law, "neither indeed can be".<sup>1</sup> But Freud goes farther. So subordinate, as he claims, is the mind to these instinctual forces, that every mental state has for its real aim the pleasuring of some instinct, and an object that bears no relation to these forces simply cannot exist for the mind at all. These biological instinctual forces in turn are related to the preservation and reproduction of life and to the quest of pleasure and power. Later Freud came to add the so-called Death instinct or Death Wish, of which more presently.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 7: 23; 8: 6.

How, then, does Freud chart out the human personality? For answer we must examine three outstanding terms to which, in each case, Freud has attached a special significance. The terms are *Id*, *Ego*, and *Super-ego*. The *Id* (Latin impersonal pronoun, meaning "it") represents man's impersonal animal nature. To use Freud's own language, it is "what is original, primitive and infantile in mental life, what we find in operation in the child, but in part overlook in him because it is on so small a scale". It is "a cauldron of seething excitement", of impulses quite unrestrained and that seek immediate gratification. Of reason and conscience the *Id* knows nothing.

The *Ego* is the human self, the "I", partly unconscious but mainly conscious; it is rational and critical and maintains a censorship over the *Id*. It relates itself not only to the *Id* but also to the external world as such and to the *Super-ego*.

What is the *Super-ego*? It is the confluence and reservoir of "all the age-long values which have been handed down . . . from generation to generation", the vehicle of social tradition. In the main, though not in the earliest stages of infancy, it is at the *Super-ego's* bidding that the *Ego* imposes its censorship upon the *Id* and brings about repressions. In the life of the child the rôle of the *Super-ego* is assumed by the parents; later it passes to society as such. The stresses and conflicts of the *Ego* arise from the extreme difficulty of adjustment to the *Id*, to the external world, and to the *Super-ego*. For, of course, the *Ego* must not only subordinate itself to the *Super-ego*, but also relate itself equably to the external world and control the almost uncontrollable *Id*; it must do this or suffer maladjustment with its consequent friction.

We must not, however, be misled by this language into supposing that in all this the *Ego*, as Freud sees it, is a free agent. All the activities that have been described are mechanical and produced under determinate laws of cause and effect. The play of "volition" and "purpose" is no more "free" than the dance of shadows on the wall or the flicker and frolic of flames in a wood fire. Nevertheless the action, the conflict, is real, and "we believe", says Freud, "that civilization has been built up under the pressure of the struggle for existence by sacrifices in gratification of the primitive

impulses"—built up, that is to say, by the sublimation, in the interests of society, of the instinctual urges of the Id. But it must be borne in mind that, though these urges may be sublimated, the Id itself cannot be transformed. It is St. Paul's "natural man", or rather what he means by "the flesh"; it is not rational "mind" but the totality of lawless instincts which operate upon the mind from below.

## 5

We pass now to another of the cardinal Freudian doctrines, namely, that the most important repressions occur in early childhood. It is suggested that the first "trauma" (emotional conflict) occurs at birth, and that certain decisive emotional experiences, which affect the mental life of the subject, occur in early infancy. Thus the life of the child up to the age of four is usually dominated by the family, and particularly by the mother. It is the mother, or the one who takes her place, who attends to all the baby's needs. It is for her that the infant has that feeling of "conjunctiveness" which is the earliest form of affection. It is upon her that he depends for nourishment and for every physical comfort, and the instinct of self-preservation impels him to cling to her.

At this point Freud passes from the region of plain, observable and indisputable fact to draw his now well-known and basic inference. For according to Freud, this infantile affection is sexual. It must be understood that the term "sexual", as used by Freudians, covers a variety of feelings and impulses, but Freud does not hesitate to dogmatize: "*With boys, the wish to beget a child from their mother is never absent . . . and this in spite of their being completely incapable of forming any clear idea of the means for fulfilling their wishes.*"<sup>1</sup> The existence of such a wish, so dominant and universal that it is "never absent", and this at a period when the child is "completely incapable" of forming any idea of the means for fulfilling it, would seem to be difficult of positive scientific proof. We may feel that it could be established only by the direct and unanimous testimony of the subjects covered by the statement—the testimony of the

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Papers*, quoted by F. H. Bartlett, *Sigmund Freud*, 1938, p. 50.

male population of this planet that their ever-present infantile desire was to beget a child from their mother: a testimony whose possibility is precluded by the terms of the statement. But the statement as it stands is dogmatic.

Freud proceeds to show that the child's sexual love for his mother is naturally possessive. He wants the mother all to himself and resents the intrusion of any rival. The inevitable rival at this stage is, however, the father, who divides the mother's attentions and affections. The child has a natural affection for the father also, but the emotions of love and antagonism clash, and what emerges is the famous "Œdipus Complex"—the term which derives from the Greek legend of Œdipus (*Odyssey* xi., 271 f.), who kills his father and marries his mother. Here, according to the Freudian theory, we have "the nuclear complex of all neuroses", a complex which remains in the Unconscious and affects the mind, not only of the child, but also of the mature man. Thus we are to understand that the sense of guilt which, in one form or another, is common to man, is traceable to the infantile parricidal impulse which is born of sexual jealousy. And here perhaps Malinowski's somewhat contrary findings should be mentioned.

Malinowski, whose psychological investigations took him to Melanesia, found that among the Trobrianders paternal authority is not recognized. Instead the authority over the children of the family reposes in the *uncle* (the mother's brother), the father in turn having authority over his *sister's* children, while property is always inherited through the mother. Malinowski's investigations convinced him that among these Trobrianders there was no trace of the Œdipus Complex at all, but that, on the other hand, their dreams revealed a certain hostility for the maternal uncle—an hostility whose source could not be sexual but might be economic (a score for Marx).

Freudians replied that the Trobriand system at least argued a deliberate *avoidance* of the Œdipus danger and therefore a recognition of its existence. But clearly, if the Freudian theory is correct and the Œdipus Complex thus avoided is produced by the son's sexual jealousy of his father, *there is no reason why the Trobriand system should have made for its avoidance at all*, or affected it in any way; for the father still remained the husband of his

wife and therefore (according to Freud) the hated rival of the infant "Oedipus". That sons easily become attached to their mothers, and daughters to their fathers, that these attachments may be possessive and jealous, and that as factors in the emotional life both of children and of parents these attachments may have great potency—all this is unquestionable; but such considerations by no means equate with the Freudian theory.

What is perhaps more significant is the criticism of this aspect of Freudianism by Freud's one-time disciple, Jung. "The contrast", he observes, "between Freud and myself goes back to essential differences in our *basic assumptions*."<sup>1</sup> For, as he proceeds to say, Freud "began by taking sexuality as the only driving power", and though he came to modify this view, the "rampant terminology of sex" remained to vitiate all discussion of the human *psyche*.

The psychology we at present possess is the testimony of a few individuals here and there regarding what they have found within themselves. . . . What Freud has to say about sexuality, infantile pleasure . . . as well as what he says about incest and the like can be taken as the truest expression of his own psychic make-up. By his avowal of what he has found in himself Freud has assisted at the birth of a great truth about man. He has devoted his life and strength to the construction of a psychology which is a formulation of his own being.<sup>2</sup>

There is controversial bitterness here, but it is difficult to resist Jung's contention that here the Freudian theory rests less upon facts than upon certain "basic assumptions" and upon the inferences which they dictate—assumptions and inferences which in Freud's case have their source in a materialistic philosophy. For a scientist whose "basic assumptions" are different will, though working upon the same factual data, draw different inferences and arrive at different conclusions. That there is a manifest impulse in children and young animals for what we have called "conjunctiveness", for a physical nestling up to loved objects for warmth, nourishment, enjoyment and protection, is a commonplace of observation and experience. The inference that the impulse is sexual, and

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 1944, p. 47. (Italics not in the original.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 135.

the conclusion that "with boys the wish to beget a child from their mother is never absent", is another matter. As Jung observes, "Freud's method of interpretation rests upon 'reductive' explanations which invariably lead backward and downward, and it has a destructive effect if it is used in an exaggerated and one-sided way".

Finally, we may note under this head that Freud marked the years from the age of four to puberty as a time of complete quiescence so far as sex impulses are concerned—complete *amnesia* (forgetfulness) regarding the earlier years. He believed this interval, the "latency period", to be a universal characteristic, and held that the lapse into quiescence, followed by a "second thrust" of sex at adolescence, might be "a heritage of the cultural development necessitated by the glacial epoch". Apparently this means that the normal life of the race was so interrupted by the rigours of the ice age that the human *psyche* has borne the marks of it through the succeeding ages and down to this day. It is a theory that is worth noting, if only because it is interesting that the notion of a universal "psychic break", whose effects are perpetuated from immemorial time and from generation to generation, should be entertained by one who would have dismissed as a contemptible fantasy the doctrines of the Fall and of Original Sin. That the belief that *ice* should produce a psychic effect transmissible through untold generations should seem reasonable, and the belief that *sin* should do so, unreasonable, depends after all upon one's "basic assumptions".

It is hardly less interesting that Freud's Marxist critics should have discerned in his general theories simply and precisely "the internalization of the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization". The best psychiatry, it seems, or seemed in an earlier decade, is the Revolution and the Soviet (Marxist) State, where, because "aggressive impulses are directed from persons to things", no "subterranean hostile urges need be turned against the individual himself", and "no irrational sense of guilt or hypernormal, hypocritical substitute for social conscience need arise".<sup>1</sup> It appears that here again we see the different effects of differing "basic assumptions". A psychology based upon

<sup>1</sup> See Bartlett, *Collected Papers*, pp. 119, 120.

the Marxist Dialectic must differ in its inferences and conclusions from a psychology based upon merely "bourgeois" materialism.

## 6

Until the outbreak of the first World War the erotic or sexual principle was dominant in Freud's interpretation of human nature. Men, he says, seek happiness, they want to become happy and to remain so: consequently they aim, on the one hand, at the elimination or avoidance of discomfort and pain, and on the other at the experience of intense pleasures, the more intense the better. In early infancy this *libido* knows no object other than the vaguely conscious self. The baby cannot distinguish between itself and others and therefore its *libido* is not directed outwards. Later, this ego-*libido* becomes object-*libido*—directed, that is, toward objects that attract it with the promise of pleasure; and then it becomes recognizably sexual and erotic. When the desire for sexual sensation is frustrated, then the urge whose aim is inhibited turns to some other aim; but the urge itself remains the same. According to Freud, the love of Beauty (Art, *Æsthetics*) is "a perfect example" of this; as he puts it, "its derivation from the realms of sexual sensation is all that seems certain." But what is true of Art is true, he declares, of Religion and of every other cult; their origins are all sexual.

But during and after the first World War, and in connection with his study of war-psychosis, the existence and tremendous dynamism of a universal non-erotic but extremely aggressive instinct was discovered by Freud. "I can no longer understand", he confessed in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "how we could have overlooked the universality of non-erotic aggression and destruction" There was a type of dream, he now observed, that had nothing to do with wish-fulfilment, nothing to do with the pleasure-principle; there were dreams that were harrowing and that envisaged sheer destruction; the nihilistic urge behind these phenomena he called the Death-instinct or Death-wish, and he came to believe that it was never absent in any vital process. How was it to be explained?



Here again Freud passes into speculative theory. There is, he observes in his *New Introductory Lectures*, an innate tendency in all living things *to reinstate a previous condition of existence*, and this even in opposition to the pleasure-principle

If it is true that once, in an inconceivably remote past, and in an unimaginable way, life arose out of inanimate matter, then, in accordance with our hypothesis, an instinct must, at that time, have come into being, whose aim it was to abolish life once more and re-establish the inorganic state of things. If in this instinct we recognize the impulse to self-destruction, then we can regard that impulse as the manifestation of the death-instinct which can never be absent in any vital process.

This theory may be right or wrong, but the cosmic speculations of Empedocles were not more philosophical or more innocent of scientific proof. To say so is, of course, no criticism of Freud. A thinker whose *milieu* is inductive science cannot be denied the right allowed to all other men to indulge in speculative theorizing or philosophizing. But the criticism does apply to those who would impute to the whole *corpus* of Freudian doctrine the authority of "science".

## 7

We may now attempt to sum up the Freudian findings. For this purpose we can hardly do better than to adopt, in part, the summary of Freudian "axioms" made out by Dr. Rudolf Allers, an Adlerian psychologist and a Catholic, in his critical examination of the Viennese school.<sup>1</sup>

1. All mental processes develop according to the pattern of the reflex mechanism.
2. All mental processes are of an energetic nature.
3. All mental processes are strictly determined by the law of causality.
4. Every mental phenomenon derives ultimately from an instinct.

One or two of these "axioms" may need explanation.

By "reflex mechanism" is meant that arrangement and inter-connection of nerves and muscles by means of which we (for example) blink our eyes or duck our heads. To say that all

<sup>1</sup> *The Successful Error*, 1941.

mental processes develop according to the pattern of this mechanism is to say that our thinking is a mechanical response to certain sensory stimuli. Again, when it is said in "axiom" 2 that all mental processes are "energetic", the meaning is that they are governed by the same laws as those that govern electrical energy or heat or steam. And thus the statement in "axiom" 3 that all mental processes are determined by the law of causality means that our thinking is not in any sense spontaneous or free. Every mental occurrence, every dream or plan or thought or sentiment (including, of course, Freud's own adumbrations), is strictly determined by causal factors, and these factors have their source either in the bodily constitution of the individual thinker or in his past history.

What emerges, then, is the Freudian conception of Man. It is essentially a materialistic conception. All the higher activities of man—art, poetry, science, philosophy, religion—all thought itself and all systems of thought, derive from the instincts, and the instincts themselves are simply part of the blind mechanism of Nature. The idea of moral personality thus falls away, for if there is no freedom there can be no morality; and religion, of necessity, is seen as the most pathetic of all illusions. Its derivation is from the region of sexual sensation, and like art, it is an urge with an inhibited aim. "The whole thing", as Freud says in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "is so patently infantile, so incongruous with reality, that to one whose attitude to humanity is friendly it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life."<sup>1</sup> So that there is left to us, perhaps, only the reflection that even this "painful thought" itself, and this pontifically "friendly" attitude of Freud to the human race, have taken their pattern from the thinker's reflex mechanism and derive ultimately from his blind instinct.

It was natural that, this being the Freudian conception of Man, Christianity itself should come in for special criticism. In the volume just referred to Freud has an illuminating passage on the Golden Rule, which he describes as "Christianity's proudest possession", but which he apparently confuses

<sup>1</sup> The reference is specifically to belief in Divine Providence.

with the command, "Love thy neighbour as thyself". If, he says, we approach this rule without prepossession, we shall hardly be able to suppress a feeling of astonishment as at something unnatural. *Why* should we love our neighbours as ourselves?

What good is it to us? If I love someone, he must be worthy of it in some way or other. . . . He will be worthy of it if he is so like me in important respects that I can love myself in him; worthy of it if he is so much more perfect than I that I can love my ideal of myself in him. . . . But if he is a stranger to me and cannot attract me by any value he has in himself or any significance he may have already acquired in my emotional life, it will be hard for me to love him. I shall even be doing wrong if I do, for my love is valued as a privilege by all those belonging to me; it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on a level with them.

And indeed not only is the stranger not worthy of love, but also—

to be honest, I must confess he has more claim to my hostility, even to my hatred. He does not seem to have the least trace of love for me . . . if he can merely get a little pleasure out of it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me, showing his power over me.

Here the master's excursion from psychology to ethics is not happy, but, viewed as a personal confession, and particularly if we remember that Freud's own family had its own bitter memories of the slanders and insults of anti-Semitic "neighbours", its psychopathy is not difficult to understand. It points to Jung's contention that Freud could not escape the constraints and inhibitions of his own subjectivity—that his doctrine was, in short, "the formulation of his own psychic make-up". And this, of course, is consonant with the explicit teaching of Freudianism itself. When Freud declared of the human ego that it was not master in its own house but was at the mercy of that Unconscious about which it possessed "only the veriest scraps of information", he could not except his own judgments and theories from the devastating implication. No Freudian, holding the views he does, can consistently pon-

tificate about his psychological judgments; for even the psychologist must be at the mercy of his own Unconscious.

Finally, to say that the aims of Psycho-analysis fall short of the aim of religion is not to criticize Psycho-analysis. Religion has to do with the cure of souls, Psycho-analysis with the cure of neuroses; religion deals with sin, Psycho-analysis with disease. But when Freud, committed to his materialistic scheme, felt obliged to attack religion as an illusion, it was not because of the positive facts which his scientific investigations had laid bare, but because of the inferences and conclusions prompted by his underlying theory. For by assuming theoretically at the outset that the basis of all life is inanimate matter, that free-will is an illusion, that all mental activity springs from the instincts, and that all behaviour is determined by instinctual mechanism, Freud was committed to a philosophic view of man, the world, and reality which became a Nessus shirt which he could not strip off.

There is, indeed, as Jung remarks, nothing to prevent speculation from regarding the human *psyche* as a complicated biochemical phenomenon, and at bottom a mere dance of electrons; but then speculation it is, and not positive science. For neither is there, for that matter, anything to prevent the speculative mind from regarding the unpredictable behaviour of electrons as the sign of psychic life, even in the electrons themselves. But when Freud approached his patients as complicated biochemical phenomena, this assumption set definite limits to his findings and to the range of his interpretations. That his methods "worked" may be adduced as confirmatory of his assumptions; but other methods based upon contrary assumptions have also "worked"; and Freud himself could half-ironically confess: "I do not think our success can compare with Lourdes." Those who believed in the Blessed Virgin, as he explained, were so much more numerous than those who believed in the Unconscious.

For ourselves, in these studies, the important fact is that in Freud that movement of the human mind which, beginning so hopefully with Bacon and Descartes in the exaltation of Man, had gradually cut itself away from the Christian tradition—the important fact is that in Freud we see that movement in the

name of Science, reducing Man to a "biochemical phenomenon", his spiritual dignity a fantasy, his moral personality an illusion, and even his rational processes an affair of "reflex mechanism". He is left with his instincts, his neuroses and his Death Wish, but the lord of creation is no longer allowed to be master even in his own crumbling house of clay: slave or robot, he is hustled blindly on, in the "inexorable cycle of biological events".

So our Freudian man of intellect, as Jung says, comes forward shaking his head and saying with Faust, *Thou art conscious only of the single urge*. And Jung adds his own conclusion:

There is nothing that can free us from this bond except that opposite urge of life, the spirit. It is not the children of the flesh but the "children of God" who know freedom.

Thus our studies have shown us what Maritain has called the gradual formation of the *bourgeois* Pharisaism which captivated the mind of the nineteenth century—the self-sufficient moral man, whom Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (and Pareto) gloried in unmasking. And we have seen that what Maritain calls the tremendous promises of enlightenment, progress, and earthly beatitude, made to mankind from the time of Bacon and Descartes, somehow fell short of fulfilment; and not simply fell short but became a ghastly mockery.

After having put aside God in order to become self-sufficient, man loses his soul; he seeks himself in vain, turning the universe upside down in his effort to find himself again. He finds only masks, and behind those masks, death<sup>1</sup>

And thus in Freud—and after three centuries of scientific, rationalistic humanism—the Kingdom of Man declines, and the MENE MENE is inscribed upon the walls of his citadel. As Freud sees him, Man himself, mocked and outraged by the Science in which he has trusted, and wounded to the quick in his "naïve self-love", is denied at last even the right to be master in his own house. He is exposed as a pathetic effigy of humanity, stripped of every semblance of that god-like dignity with which he had once been invested—and exhorted to make he best of it.

<sup>1</sup> Maritain, *The Crisis of Modern Humanism*, 1945, p. 11.

# 11

## REVIEW

WE began this series of studies with the consideration that throughout the Christian ages there has been a Great Tradition of Faith. This Faith certainly has assumed many forms, Eastern and Western, medieval and modern, Catholic and Protestant; but there has never been any deviation from certain fundamental beliefs about God, Man, and the world. All Christendom has been one in the affirmation that God is the source of all life, that the Divine love and wisdom are sovereign over the whole universe, and that the Divine will is our ultimate authority and universal law. Likewise Christendom has been united in the faith that in Christ the Divine purpose has been redeemingly revealed to mankind, and that in Him the Good Life and the Good Society have been made available for sinful men. That all men are sinful it has also been united in affirming, and in this doctrine it has recognized man's moral freedom, for puppets and automata cannot sin. And by proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and life eternal through Christ, it has taught the sacredness of human personality, and has invested human society with a meaning and purpose that transcend, while they include, all that is within the calculus of time. What we have followed in these chapters has been the gradual departure from this tradition in modern times.

With Francis Bacon and Descartes the departure showed itself as little more than a delimitation of the respective spheres of influence of Religion and Reason. Revelation and Faith were to be left in undisputed control in the supernatural sphere, Reason was to set up her autonomy in the sphere of Nature; and thus a diplomatic *entente* was to be established between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man. Bacon as the pioneer of "applied science", and Descartes as the pioneer of modern rationalism, the one a Protestant, the

other a Catholic, were as hopeful as the medieval Schoolmen of a working agreement between reason and faith: but while the primary interest of the Schoolmen was the maintenance of the sovereign values of the Faith, the primary interest of Bacon and Descartes was the advancement of secular knowledge and human power.

It is easy to see now that such a concordat as they imagined could not be permanent. The human mind craves for unity even though it cannot achieve it; it does not rest in the division of Reality into two unrelated exclusive worlds; and by Spinoza the division was promptly set aside. Spinoza carried Cartesian rationalism into the sphere of religion and, breaking with the Christian tradition, affirmed a pantheistic monism in which the distinction between God and the world was dissolved; while Hume, a little later, passed to a dissolvent scepticism in which God, substance, human personality, causality, law altogether disappeared. In the thought of Kant we saw a supreme attempt to recapture the values of the Christian Faith and re-state them in rationalistic terms. What was achieved was an austere moralism in which God became the apotheosis of the Categorical Imperative and in which man, though his perversity was acknowledged, was bidden to achieve perfection in his own strength. In Rousseau we saw the proud hopes of the new movement declining into disillusionment. The subjugation of Nature through scientific rationalism no longer seemed the way to human happiness; instead, not rationalism but naturalism, not scientific progress but the care-free life of "the simple savage", seemed the goal to be aimed at. On the other hand, we saw Auguste Comte carrying the cult of science to its extreme limit. The Christian Faith and every form of metaphysical belief were to be superseded by a positivist philosophy based upon assured scientific conclusions, and out of this was to be elaborated a Religion of Humanity whose object of supreme devotion was to be Man himself. And we noted how the Comtian movement turned in the end against science itself and passed into mystical aberrations, with M. Comte as the self-appointed High Priest of the human race.

In Karl Marx we observed a somewhat different reaction. That development of applied science which Bacon had foreseen

had, by this time, led to the Machine Age and the industrial revolution, and it was this that determined Marx's thinking. Every whit as anti-metaphysical as Comte, he gave himself to his materialistic dialectic, in which human history was seen as the record of man's reactions to economic stimuli, and in which mankind were the loose parts of a total mechanism awaiting articulation in the Communist order. And we saw that Darwinism furnished weapons both for the Marxists and for the anti-Marxists. By emphasizing the evolutionary struggle, it lent scientific support to the Marxian theory of the class war, and at the same time armed exploitive capitalism for the defence of "free competition". If industrialism had its harsh and predatory aspects, so, it seemed, had Nature, and the sanction for unrestricted competitive struggle was found in the cosmic process.

At this point, as we noted, T. H. Huxley broke away, not from Darwinism, but from its ultimate implications, and affirmed the right of the human conscience to combat even the cosmic process itself when that process ran counter to the ethics of the Good Life. But we saw how this position, so long as it was founded upon Huxley's agnosticism, was untenable. The clay may appeal from the wheel to the Potter, but if the very existence of the Potter is in doubt, with what hope can the clay protest against the dizzy dance of the process that moulds it? And if the clay replies, "Nevertheless there is *That* in me which imperatively demands that I protest", then the nameless mysterious "That" points away to some sovereign order of reality higher than either clay or wheel, and only by assuming that order can the protest make itself rational.

Finally, in Freudianism we found the scientific-rationalistic-humanistic movement turning upon itself and rejecting all those values upon which Humanism itself had been reared. Man the thinker was deposed from his intellectual throne and his kingdom levelled to the dust. Human reason and the conscious ego were declared to be dominated by blind instinctual urges, incestuous or nihilistic; the moral personality was denied, and religion and art were seen as the expression of a frustrated sexual instinct. The proud Baconian dream had ended in nightmare.



What, then, is to be said of all this? In the first place it must be said that the movement under review was, in a sense, inevitable. The break with medieval authority, the following up of the inductive method with all its scientific consequences, the challenge to human reason to re-interpret the world and life in terms of the new knowledge, and the consequent critical examination of traditional beliefs and of their sources—all this was the logical outcome of the Renaissance, and of no movement in history could it be more true to say, "It had to be."

But in the second place it is equally clear that the movement, as it has developed from Bacon and Descartes to our own day, has failed to provide a moral and inspirational substitute for that tradition of Faith from which it gradually broke away. The glamour of the new movement's dazzling successes in the field of applied science concealed that failure for a while, but it can be concealed no longer. It may be that even yet an oratorical gesture in the direction of science and rationalism as the oracles of human progress can be effective with the half-educated and the unthinking, but only with them. To examine at close quarters those systems of thought which have been put forward as substitutes for the Faith is to recognize their moral and inspirational inadequacy; so that one is reminded of Bismarck's *mot* about Napoleon III—"From afar, something; near at hand, nothing"—"a great unfathomed incapacity".

This is certainly not to disparage these systems as intellectual achievements; it is to say that no one of them has been capable of achieving what the great tradition of Faith did achieve and maintain—a new and fruitful culture and civilization. Again, to say this is not to admit by implication that the supreme function of the Faith itself has been to create a temporal order or sustain a particular civilization; it is simply to accept for the moment the secularist standard, and to note that nothing has been put forward by scientific rationalism which meets the secular test. Nothing has been put forward that offers the moral and spiritual dynamism adequate to save mankind even from the abysmal dangers which modern science itself has introduced into our world.

If our studies, then, have taught us anything it is that at no point in the development of the modern scientific-rationalist movement could the great tradition of the Faith have abdicated to the new knowledge without the surrender of values vital to Humanism itself. We may smile at Rousseau's adulation of "the natural state" and the life of "the simple savage", and at Comte's dream of a non-metaphysical "religion of humanity" which was to supplant Christianity and introduce universal happiness and peace: but even Huxley's dream of a gigantic rationalist-scientific movement of free-thought which should "organize itself into a coherent system" and bring the world into a harmonious unity seems now hardly less naïve or futile. We have lived to see a decadent humanism turn anti-human, rationalism pass into irrationalism, and anti-religious "free thought", rising to temporal power, impose its own intolerant ideologies and establish its own contraband of ideas. We have lived to see the tradition of Faith left to take over that defence of reason and of human rights and liberties which once seemed mandated to the secular Kingdom of Man.

No doubt, in spite of its nightmare developments, the Baconian dream, or something of its afterglow, still lingers. There are still left to us scientific fundamentalists and rationalistic Millenarians who look for progress toward universal happiness in the brave glad secular and agnostic world of to-morrow; there are still quaint and doctrinaire gossellers of an outmoded materialism who really believe that Utopia is at hand. All that is needed, it seems, is that man should at last rid himself of his other-worldly fables and concentrate upon the task of subjugating this one and only world to his purpose. Alas, a this-worldly science and a materialistic philosophy have now despatched lordly man himself to the limbo of fable. The steam-plough or bull-dozer is not more regardful of the earthworms it turns up in its tracks than, apparently, is the cosmic process of the soulless, will-less mechanistic organisms which we are taught to recognize as human beings. How then shall man order his happiness?

In fact, the more man has concentrated upon this world to the exclusion of any recognition of the eternal world, the more nearly he has come to turning this world, not into a paradise,

but into a hell. It should at last become plain, even to the most purblind of the older rationalistic school, that the denial of God and of human immortality, carrying with it the denial of all transcendent standards of right and justice and of the sacredness of human personality, leaves man defenceless against the callous exploitive forces of the National State. For in the name of what right, what law, shall he, the creature of a day, protest? If the heavens are vacant, then there is for him no higher law than the law of the State or the brute law of force; and we are back to the argument of Thrasymachus, that justice is simply the advantage of the powerful. Socrates thought otherwise, but then Socrates believed in God, the soul and immortality.

We have already cited Whitehead's view that, in point of dogmatic authority, modern scientific thought has come to occupy the position of Scholasticism at the end of the Middle Ages. And the ready docility of the popular mind under the dogmatism of whatever claims the certification of science is understandable. Not only are the oracles of science supported by the signs and wonders of technological invention, but also these oracles, being the expression of a knowledge derived from direct observation and experiment, are presented as pronouncements of proven fact. And such, no doubt, within a limited province, they are. It is therefore easy for the popular imagination to picture the scientific thinker as communing face to face with Total Fact as Moses communed with God on the mount. And it is but one more step to pass from this to the assumption that the scientific rationalist or rationalistic scientist is the prophet and high priest who mediates to the world all that is worthy of the name of truth, all that is knowable concerning ultimate reality.

It was against this persuasion, deriving from that "bifurcation of the universe" which began with Bacon and Descartes, that Whitehead was moved to protest. For the assumptions that the five senses provide exclusively our direct and definite avenues of communication with the external world, and that the data not directly provided by the activities of the senses may be ignored—these assumptions have bred another. They have begotten the belief that what may be ignored as outside the

provenance of the senses is not only negligible but unreal. Yet how limited is the competence of "direct observation" even within its own sphere, and no matter how ingeniously the sense organs may be reinforced! The observed object in space can report itself to the observer only by means of such radiations as are within the very limited range of his sensory apparatus: what is thus received is then relayed to the neural terminal, decoded, in an inexplicable way, into a mental percept, adjusted to the conceptual furniture of the observer's mind, and finally translated into word-symbols. How much gets through? How much is distorted? How much never gets recorded at all? As Whitehead says,<sup>1</sup> we have inherited not only an observational order but also a conceptional order—that is, a rough system of ideas in terms of which we interpret what we observe. No doubt novel observations modify our conceptions, but also novel concepts "suggest novel possibilities of observational discrimination".

For also the observer is limited psychologically. Descartes, as we have seen, fixed upon those elements in the structure of his experience which, being clear and distinct, seemed to offer themselves for precise intellectual discourse. It was a method of simplification which involved a conscious discrimination of objects experienced. And it was easy for the assumption to step in that those observed factors which, by reason of their conspicuous clarity, lent themselves to discrimination must be the important factors, and might thus be confidently used for the interpretation of the universe of things which engages the scientific philosophic mind. But this was to ignore the subjective limitations involved. For those aspects of experience which have, for the experient, the importance of peculiar clarity, and which he isolates, are those for which he has a conscious or unconscious "concern", and which therefore have for him an "affective tone" to which his mind is keyed. It does not follow that this process of discrimination and abstraction necessarily deals with those factors which are objectively the most important. Nevertheless such discriminations add up, and their cumulative effect may be to yield a notion of the universe which is at variance with reality. This is what Whitehead calls

<sup>1</sup> *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge University Press, 1933, p. 198.

the Dogmatic Fallacy which has affected modern thought to the present day—the persuasion, namely, that “we are capable of producing notions which are adequately defined in respect to the complexity of relationships required for their illustration in the real world”.<sup>1</sup>

And he does not hesitate to say that the history of Western thought cannot be understood unless account is taken of this grave weakness.

Observational discrimination is not dictated by the impartial facts. It selects and discards, and what it retains is rearranged in a subjective order of prominence. This order of prominence in observation is in fact a distortion of the facts.<sup>2</sup>

In short, modern science and its dogmatics, for all their dazzling successes, have tended, he claims, to canalize thought and observation within predetermined limits based upon inadequate metaphysical assumptions.

Some of these assumptions we have had occasion to note in the course of our studies, but one example may be added. For Freud religious faith was a form of infantilism, the sign of a wishful quest for a father-substitute, and thus an escape from the real world into a world of fantasy. Yet, according to Freud himself, the parricidal wish, born of jealousy and resistance to parental control, is as common and conspicuous a factor in child-psychology as the feeling of dependence and the sense of paternal authority and protection. Therefore it would have been as plausible to trace atheism to the parricidal impulse as to trace religion to the desire for a father-substitute. But in fact the clinical observations and conclusions of Freud were framed within the metaphysical assumption that the whole of reality is contained within the physical order and that God and Spirit belong to the region of neurotic fantasy. Atheism, therefore, so far as it had any clinical significance, indicated normality, and religion a neurotic flight from reality.<sup>3</sup> It is in this way that, in Whitehead's language, a professionalized scholarship has

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 198, 199.

<sup>3</sup> See article, “The Psychology of Religion”, by Professor Bernard Phillips, *Hibbert Journal*, January, 1948.

tended to circumscribe reason by reducing its topic to "bare *sensa*" and to triviality. "The world will again sink into the boredom of a drab detail of rational thought, unless we retain in the sky some reflection of light from the sun of Hellenism."<sup>1</sup>

It may indeed be as undesirable to be expert-ridden as to be priest-ridden: but it seems to be true that modern man, in his inevitable revolt from medieval authoritarianism, has fallen under a narrow and limiting dogmatism of a secular sort. But a new revolt is upon us: our age begins to feel an insurgent distrust of its masters, and we are witnessing in the West the collapse of scientific and rationalistic humanism. The mood of revolt is not without its perils—from panic superstition, or from cynicism and nihilism. But we cannot turn back if we would. We need new empowerment and a new and living synthesis of thought and faith. And we may believe that the tradition of Faith that survives in our world is no pale Platonic afterglow but the promise of a new dawn.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151.



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